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NAG

VOL 10 ISSUE 2 05.2007

ÜBĒRGÄMĒR

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05



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- Space Quest Collection (61621)

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- Ice Age 2 (60353) ► Spyro Enter The Dragonfly (38615)
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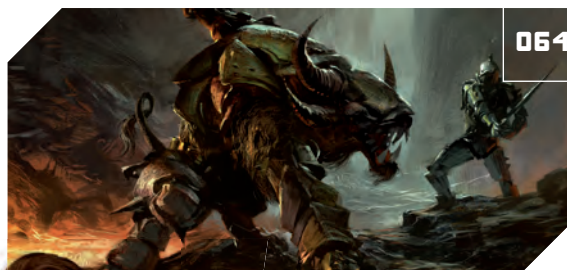
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 Battlestar Galactica: Beyond the Red Line
 Brian Lara International Cricket
 Dawn of Magic | DeVinci
 Frontline: Fields of Thunder
 Galactic Civilizations II Gold | Genesis Rising
 Maelstrom [Multiplayer]
 Massive Assault Network 2
 Mystery Solitaire | Pathstorm
 Puzzle Quest | Red Ocean | Shrek 3

DRIVERS

ATI Catalyst 7.3 [XP]
 NVIDIA ForceWare 100.65 [Vista 32bit]
 NVIDIA ForceWare 100.65 [Vista 64bit]
 NVIDIA ForceWare 93.71 [XP]
 NVIDIA ForceWare 97.94 [GeForce 8800] [XP]

FLASH

Super Mario Bros Z Episodes 1 - 5

GAME.DEV

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MMO

Trickster

MODIFICATIONS

System Shock 2 (2007 edition)

PATCHES

America's Army v2.80 - v2.81
 Battlegrounds: Midway v1.1
 Command & Conquer 3 v1.02 & v1.03
 Dawn of War: Dark Crusade v1.11 - v1.20
 Europa Universalis III v1.2.1
 S.T.A.L.K.E.R. v1.0001
 Silent Hunter 4 v4.1.1
 Space Empires V v1.33
 Supreme Commander v1.5.58.21925 & v3220 - 3223
 Sword of the Stars v1.1.0 - 1.2.2 & v1.2.1 - 1.2.2
 The Sims 2 v277
 Titan Quest v1.20 - v1.30 (revision 2)

TRAILERS

Audition Online
 Bioshock
 Enemy Territory: Quake Wars
 Grand Theft Auto 4
 Gran Turismo HD
 Heavenly Sword
 Kingdom Hearts Final Mix
 Marvel Ultimate Alliance
 Mass Effect
 Mini37
 No More Heroes
 Odin Sphere
 Overlord
 Penumbra Overture
 Ratchet & Clank
 Resistance: Fall of Man
 Speedball 2
 Spider-Man 3
 Super Paper Mario
 The Darkness
 Warhammer Online
 World in Conflict
 Xbox 360 Spring Update

WALKTHROUGHS

The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles

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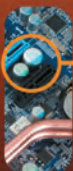
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One, need a shift in how they do business

One of my primary goals for the next year, so

A pixel art illustration featuring three characters from the Street Fighter series. On the left is Ryu, a muscular man with a black gi and white pants, in a fighting stance. In the center are two identical clones of M. Bison, wearing blue suits with checkered patterns and holding briefcases. On the right is Zangief, a very large, muscular man with a large belly, wearing red pants and a red belt, with his arms raised in a power pose. The background is a simple grey and white striped floor.

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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Christopher Human
SUBJECT: PC vs. Console

IN **NAG** THE PAST couple of months, there have been numerous comments made regarding the following topic: *NAG* has started liking consoles more than PCs and that PCs are better/worse than consoles. I am getting tired of reading this in a magazine where I feel both are represented equally, so allow me to set the record straight.

There are people who buy both PCs and consoles because they are fanatic gamers, but there are people who only buy the one or the other, and therefore tend to prefer the platform they own. As an owner of both a PC and a console (on both of which I play games), I will present both sides. The people who buy consoles, I find, are normally people who don't have very powerful PCs, or who have old PCs, which are unable to play most of the new games that demand high-level hardware (which can be very expensive). A console doesn't require hardware upgrades to run games and therefore allows people to play new games in happiness. On the other hand, the games range from R400-R600, which can break the bank (unless you only buy one or two games only). Also, some people find it difficult to play certain games

on a console's controller (FPS and RTS games for example). Nevertheless, some people find it easier to play other games on their console's controller (Platformers and Sports games for example). Some people also prefer to play games on their TVs because they have bigger screens. (Yes, I know, you can plug your PC into some TVs, but around five years ago this technology wasn't available when the PS2, Xbox and GameCube were top consoles.)

PCs have (or rather 'had', with today's technology) the advantage of network gaming, which allowed 32+ players to play at once (out-doing consoles, which offered 4-8 players max). PCs, of course, have the hardware advantage (which allows for better quality graphics and gameplay) that keeps getting better at a quicker rate, but, as previously stated in *NAG*, hardware is getting expensive and not everyone can afford it. The keyboard and mouse offer ease when it comes to control settings in all games, which allow everyone to feel comfortable while playing (no matter what their experience/skill level). The games are cheaper at around R200-R350, which is half of a console game price! PCs also have (or once again 'had') the advantage of the Internet, which allowed patches to be



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH:
Do you still pirate games?

downloaded and then could fix problems/bugs in games. The Internet also allowed fellow gamers to share news, experience, play against each other, so gamers could improve their skills, and enter LAN events, etc. Now the time has come to answer the question of which is better, and the answer is: BOTH!

Either platform can be seen as the better one. It all depends on the following factors: your budget; how seriously you take your gaming; and what game types you play.

Either in this respect can be seen as better than the other one as it all has to do with the person. (In other words, you can only say one is better than the other in terms of hardware specifications, but NOT in terms of gameplay, as that differs from person to person.)

Is there anything left to say about this topic? Over here at NAG we tend to agree: games are games and being too focused on the platform they're on just spoils things. It's all about the games, not the machine, and some genres work better than others on some platforms. Nevertheless, if one platform suddenly is able to do what another does, moaning about it won't help. Just get more games!

FROM: Gareth Robberts
SUBJECT: Concerned Reader

I AM INCREDIBLY DISAPPOINTED WITH you.

I have been buying this magazine every month for about three years now, and I have always recommended it to my friends and new gamers. Now, I am embarrassed to even admit reading it. I am not putting the sole blame on you, as it is not only the layout of the magazine that has been steadily declining, but also the quality of the previews and the reviews. *NAG* used to always be South Africa's leading gaming magazine. *NAG* would always have reviews out months before *PCF* (*PC Format*). The reviews were top class. Now I not only have to wait two months after *PCF* has released its reviews, but the reviews tell me no more than what *PCF* does, so I land up just reading from www.gamespot.com. It is not only the magazine that has gone to the dogs, but the DVD as well. I used to laugh at *PCF*'s attempts to keep up with *NAG*. I would brag to my friends about what I got on the disks. Now I hide my disks when they come over. Not only did *PCF* release the DVD first, but they also released dual layer first, and they have cases for their disks. But what has topped all of this is the fact that when a reader gives some constructive criticism (March 2007, page 13, 'The old *NAG*'), you mock him! Who do you think you are? He is the customer, you are the supplier. I think it is about time you realised this. You don't even mock him in a way that makes his argument seem ridiculous, but you just go on about plants! I think you really need to sit down and think about your magazine; it is steadily becoming trash. Next month will be the last time I buy this magazine, and the only reason I will is to see if I get a reply. In the magazine you promised the *Battlefield 2* patch, but I was unable to find it. Is that an error on my part, or is it just not there? I have always been able to view the disks before, I am able to view the movies, but I just can't seem to find the

patch and I really want the patch. I hope to be hearing from you, as I am a huge fan of the old *NAG* and do not wish to see the magazine die in such a horrible way.

Sounds more like you are just really angry about something. Okay, firstly, we don't agree that the design has gone backwards – the contrary, in fact. Okay, some reviews are later than usual, but NAG still reviews far more games than any of its direct competition. All that said, why are you waiting two or three months to read Gamespot reviews? Maybe NAG doesn't need to focus so hard on reviews thanks to the great amount of Internet gaming sites. By the way, thanks for telling us about the whole customer/supplier thing. In all the years here it never crossed our mind. Probably because we're too busy enjoying the trash we produce.

FROM: Kapous.
SUBJECT: Mom's Law

I WANT TO SAY THANKS to all the *NAG* staff for last month's great issue of *NAG*. I enjoyed it very much! First, I want to lecture/complain about age restrictions on new games. My parents are very up tight when it comes to age restrictions on games. I am 14 and an enthusiastic gamer and *NAG* reader, but I yearn to play most of the games reviewed or previewed in your mag. Like for instance, *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, *F.E.A.R.* and *Gears of War*. My mom said no just after she had looked at the cover of *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, *F.E.A.R.* and *Gears of War*. She only heard the names of the games and already said no! (My mom

wouldn't let me go to *rAge* because the name sounded like we were going to become drug addicts!) I can't even play *Counter-Strike*! What is the point in having a high-end computer with a 512MB graphics card and I can only play things like *Barbie*. I got very lucky one time in Reggie's when my mom let me buy *Jaws Unleashed* (enjoying the only violence I have!).

Now, when it goes over to other platforms it doesn't count that much (I've got *GTA: San Andreas*), but once again a debate was started between me and the rest of my family about getting a new platform. We thought about the Xbox, but my dad said that we do not have any relationship of worthy enjoyment on any other Xbox to confirm this discussion. We also talked about the PS3, but my dad (technology does not exist in his world) said that the PS2 can do everything that the PS3 can do, so why waste money. I convinced him otherwise, but then he said that we should wait until the price is below R1,000! So, chances look very bleak for me and my gaming passion! Please help. *Barbie* is killing me from the inside!

*We're not sure how we can help, buddy, but you have our sympathy. As for your mom and violent games, well, she is your mom and we cannot go and say don't listen to her. We would have said, "Show her *Gears of War*," but that might not help. Maybe you'll have more luck when you turn sixteen. Your dad's decision to not get a console sounds like the age-old one: that much cash for a toy? Maybe make a deal with him by saving up for half.*

My parents are very up tight when it comes to age restrictions on games. I am 14 and an enthusiastic gamer and *NAG* reader, but I yearn to play most of the games reviewed or previewed in your mag.

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Got Vista? Is it cool? Getting Vista? Do you care yet?

FREAKY Kitty: I'll get Vista when I get a DX10 card, and that is three years from now.

Uncle Buck: I will get Vista this year, probably around the time *Crysis* is released. I don't really see much point in owning Vista before then, but each to his own.

Dark Master: I'm waiting to see how well Vista works and what bugs there are. XP works fine and there are not any DX10 games, so I see no reason to upgrade right now. But I do see that I will upgrade to Vista some time before the end of 2007.

RazoR89: I have Vista Ultimate. It's a lot faster than XP! I keep hearing all of these people moaning about Vista, but I can't stop telling everyone how nice it is. It feels much more reliable and stable than Windows XP.

Fr0zebud: I'll get Vista only after the first service pack comes out. It will fix many problems and I don't see any point in switching to Vista now. We installed Vista at work on some notebooks and found many bugs, especially relating to our network setup. Yes it does look beautiful, but is it worth it now?

Gen0cyde: I'm getting Vista closer to the end of the year. R5,000 is a bit much for me right now and I would rather use that money to upgrade my computer before getting the Ultimate version of Vista. I'm looking forward to it. I can't wait to have my 64-bit processor running a 64-bit operating system.

BLACKWOLF: At this moment there is no need to upgrade to Vista yet. Vista needs some time to mature. The only reason you would want to upgrade to Vista is if you have 2GB of RAM and a DX10 GPU with a game supporting DX10 (which isn't out yet).

Darkmag: Well, at the moment there is no real reason to upgrade. There are no DX10 games and even the early DX10 games will not utilise it fully. Besides that, there are tons of driver problems ranging from sound cards to graphics cards and motherboards.

O Malley: Nope, I won't get it until it sinks in that *Crysis* would look like crap on XP.

Antrix: I have Vista Home Premium and I must say... I should have got Ultimate! Sad. I've heard it's pretty awesome. Vista is not too bad because it is brand spanking new with many possible bugs. But it is quite a RAM-eater, so it's best to upgrade to about 2GB before attempting it.

Have your say on the NAG forums
<http://forums.tidemia.co.za>

I know most people complain about how they hate consoles or PCs, but the PlayStation is just a cheaper and smaller PC.

FROM: Dawid

SUBJECT: TXL Tournaments

HAVING BOUGHT YOUR MAGAZINE for many years (when it was still a soft cover and 'going up' against the *Official PlayStation 1 SA* magazine), I have enjoyed your articles over the years. However, the way www.txl.co.za has been pointed out as doing a bad job is really unfair. Now, I believe that it was not actually NAG staff who wrote that article, but rather a freelancer... But for what it's worth, why would you guys publish such an article that demolishes what a single person is trying to do for the gaming community in SA?

Yes, you know as well as I do that TXL is run by one person. Yes, to do things professionally you normally have a group of guys (or gals) who have different responsibilities. He has taken it upon himself to provide South Africa with some kind of online tournament structure that no one else provides. He's not making money out of it. So why take him down for providing a free service to us gamers and discredit him in front of everyone?

I speak out of experience. Three mates and I ran Rebound tournaments in Pietermaritzburg and Durban (www.rebound.co.za) and have decided to put everything on halt as there was not enough support from gamers and even less from distributors, even though we were making no money either. We had the good old faithful every month, which we thank dearly for their support. It cost us time and missing Springbok rugby matches. But you know what, we provided a service for our gaming community free of charge, even though it cost us. And yes, we all have day jobs.

On top of that, most of the distributors in this country are a disgrace. Futronic is a no-brainer and SK is so arrogant that one individual (just one) was willing to help (their rep in KZN). Even though over 600 people joined the tournaments we ran at the malls and we were planning larger tournaments at malls such as Cresta in JHB, they still did not get it: FREE OF CHARGE. Microsoft has been helpful to a certain extent, so I'll give them some credit as they are the only light at the end of the tunnel at the moment... even though that light shines with poorly charged batteries.

At the end of the day, I think that magazines such as NAG should be helping with having the events calendar updated with TXL tournaments and Rebound tournaments. That way gamers right around the country get what they deserve: A Gaming Community. It costs you guys nothing, basically just a couple of dates. At Rebound, we are covering 360, PS2 and DS at the moment and will cover more as soon as it becomes worthwhile.

Anyway, other than that, I really enjoyed your console history article. Thanks a million!

Granted, it is a one-man operation, but the article was written by someone who had played on the service he provides. So, as much as we should respect TXL's efforts, should we not also highlight the opinion of someone who found problems with it? Perhaps we are helping TXL by firstly highlighting the service and secondly pointing out its flaws. If TXL runs more tournaments and they are better, we'll cover that as well. But it's not NAG's responsibility to help these services succeed. That is the job of whoever is involved. The reality is that if you are planning to run a service giving players tournaments and such, you

should accept that it's a thankless job. But do your best anyway. Always look for ways to improve it and soon enough your success will mean that not even NAG's opinion will matter. We're still keeping an eye on TXL and will write about the good as well.

FROM: Bliksem182

SUBJECT: My Farewell Letter

THIS IS MY FAREWELL letter to you guys. I supported the magazine from day one! I bought my last NAG in February 2007. I fell for the WWW sky for game reviews, previews and demos. Free magazine downloads like *360Zine* and *PCGZine* was the big decision to stop buying NAG. They are just a bit more up to date and have an interactive page with short trailers inside the digital mag. They also provide just that little bit extra info. This not to say NAG is bad, but does have some shortcomings. The biggest irritation for me was that some games were released locally and there were no reviews in NAG. I know you guys have to wait for the games to arrive in the office before reviews can take place. I know it is difficult to compare digital mags to hard-copy mags. I wish NAG the best and may you have a bright future. Still proudly South African.

Don't let the door hit you on the a... oh, wait, it's not us, it's the Internet. Well, sorry, we can't compete against the mighty online world. Also, we also read those and other online mags and they are good. Hopefully, though, you'll start missing reading your NAG while on the bog. Well, we can only hope!

FROM: Mr. Torode

SUBJECT: Consoles vs. PC

I KNOW MOST PEOPLE COMPLAIN about how they hate consoles or PCs, but the PlayStation is just a cheaper and smaller PC. Anyway, you guys have a great magazine. I never read anything else, not like my friends who only collect it for the cover disk. One thing, when is *Super Retarded Dog's* next episode? I really liked the reviews of *Gears of War* and *Dead Rising* in your previous issues. I still don't understand how to use the free Game Maker. One last thing I need to ask: do you know when *Spore* is being released? The Console Wars section is really cool, although my friend says the N64 hasn't been released in South Africa yet, the stupid noob.

Super Retarded Dog? We'll check and load anything new on a future DVD. As for Spore, hopefully by the end of this year, but some reports have said 2008. So, 'not soon' is the right answer.

FROM: Ruan Engelbrecht

SUBJECT: Patches

I WOULD JUST LIKE TO say wouldn't it be cool if developers of a certain game brought out a patch, but this time with a difference: they put a new intro movie on it. I'm sure you guys are pretty bored of watching the same old movie all the time. Yes, maybe it will increase the size of the patch, but maybe it will be cool. Keep up the good work!

Why? Aren't patches big enough already? What we'd rather see are more developers releasing maps and such for free, instead of charging you for it on XBLA and similar services.

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SideShow Notebook

Open Up a Whole New Vision

Assessing pictures, music, email and even schedules in an instant, without having to boot up the computer - that is the new standard of ease of use and convenience offered by ASUS W5Fe, which combines excellent integrated design with the power and versatility of Windows Vista with full SideShow capability

The User Interface Evolved

At first sight, the ASUS W5Fe is immediately distinguished by a 2.8-inch external secondary display that brings the user experience to a whole new level. Providing full support for Windows Vista's groundbreaking SideShow feature, the secondary display allows users to view pictures, check emails, play music, access schedules and calendar information and much more without having to boot up the computer. Not only does the W5Fe's SideShow capability put information and entertainment on instant access at one's fingertips, not having to boot up the computer also helps to save power for extended use on the road. Moreover, the W5Fe's secondary screen also doubles as a system display, offering critical system information such as wireless, power and battery status at a glance.

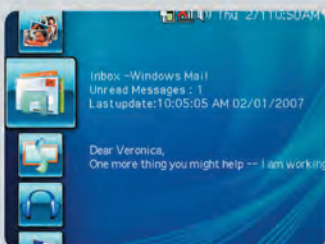
With full SideShow support, class-leading power and versatility, the W5Fe represents a yet higher state of evolution in the notebook, introducing unparalleled ease and convenience into the PC user experience.



User Friendly Interface

The SideShow window rotates 180° when closing or opening the lid so that the content shown is always upright for easy viewing.

SideShow Features



Sync E-mail

Review emails on the SideShow for fast information check.

■ This function is available with Office 2007



Personal Information Management (PIM)

A quick glance at the calendar, meeting schedule and contacts details.

■ This function is available with Office 2007



Clear System Status Display

Obtain critical system status including, wireless connections, volume, system on / off and battery life in an instant.



Multimedia Enjoyment Anytime

Sideshow media player allows photo viewing and music playback in an instant.



SONY HAS LAST LAUGH WITH EURO PS3 LAUNCH

PS3 SALES TOP WII, 360 ON OPENING WEEKEND

THE PROBLEM FOR SONY is that it painted itself into a corner and faces a non-stop barrage of negative press and cynical gamers. It was no different for the company when it finally came to launching the PlayStation 3 in Europe. Whereas the console drew flak for its limited supplies in the US, the over-supply in the UK gave it an equally negative response and a lot of doubt circulated if the console would even have a good launch considering Europe's dislike for being last on the release list despite its size in the gaming market. Sony executives even found themselves defending a lot.

However, Sony got to have the last laugh, at least for a short while. The PlayStation 3 launched in Europe and was met with a largely muted response, largely due to the large availability. But the strategy worked and according to ChartTrack 167,000 PS3s were sold in the two-day launch period, beating the 70,000 and 103,000 of the 360 and Wii. That was thanks to the 200,000 units that were available, while the other consoles were under-stocked. However, the effect of a launch quickly became apparent when PS3 sales plunged to 30,000 during the following week. While Sony hasn't commented on the drop, ChartTrack explained that it's rather normal. Due to shortages, the sales per week of the Wii and 360 remain enigmatic, so there isn't a real way to gauge the situation. Sony said that it sold 600,000 units during the launch period across Europe. During the third week after launch, though, the PS3 sold 17,000 units and the 360 11,000, while the Wii enjoyed a strong 26,000 sales.

Meanwhile, the console enjoyed a fair reception in Australia, where the console sold 20,000

units at launch. This still placed it behind the 32,000 and 30,000 the Wii and 360 claimed at launch, but hardly qualifies as a disaster. Still, analysts have called for a PS3 price cut and the console will need to perform more strongly if Sony wants to emerge victorious from the console wars without hurting itself. Even God of War's David Jaffe thinks the console is too expensive.

"I probably would have taken the Blu-ray out and sold it for less money," he said in an interview with Bonus Round on Gametrailers.

But the PS3 is not under-performing and has maintained consistent sales after its launch. It sets the stage for a turbulent year ahead as the next-generation consoles try and dominate the market. Complicating matters is the PS2, which outsells the PS3 and 360 in Japan. The console's continuing success has prompted Sony to update the PS2's shipment for the year from 11 million to 13 million.





PlayStation 2

GOD OF WAR II

THE END BEGINS

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18+

FUTUREPRESS
Official Strategy Guide

GODOFWARGAME.COM

SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!



Bioware has licensed Streambase's MMO middleware, which means that Bioware is probably working on an MMO. Maybe it ties in with all that talk of Mass Effect's episodic side.



Hot on the heels of Mark Rein apologising for a *Gears of War* fan being warned by Epic's lawyers about a custom GOW figurine he made as a gift, the suits strike again. This time, it's a painting using GOW as an inspiration. Apparently, the lawyers said it had to be destroyed or sent to them. Maybe Epic should explain to its legal arm that the fans are the people buying its games, not the lawyers.



Forget wondering about Paris Hilton. Why the hell is Kevin Federline any sort of celebrity? However, the man is. For some reason someone out there supports him, so he's decided to launch his very own search engine at searchwithkevin.prodege.com. No, we don't use it.

Calling the LOTR franchise "An incredible canvas to create epic games," EA announced that it had extended its deal with New Line Cinema for more games with elves and hobbits. The next new LOTR game is due in 2008.



3D REALMS: "WE'VE SCREWED UP DUKE"

"FIRST, WE FULLY ADMIT we've screwed up the development of *DNF*, and it's now an industry joke. I laugh (and cry) when I think about it, too. Our fault is that we set the bar too



high, and we tried too hard to make the game to beat all games." This is what Scott Miller from 3D Realms (left) told Website Yougamers in a recent interview. However, he added

that in the past eighteen months a lot had been changed on the project, including hiring some top talent.

"In the last year especially we've dramatically upgraded the level of experienced and talented

developers in-house, hiring key developers from several blockbuster projects. These new developers have made a stunningly positive impact on the project."

It would appear that 3D Realms is still working hard on the game – apparently the team working on *DNF* is currently 33 strong – though it recently got a reality check about being serious about getting the game done. Miller didn't divulge much more, but he confirmed that the game still uses Unreal technology, very likely Unreal Engine 3, and that *Duke* is destined for multiple formats. He also mentioned a digital delivery plan.

"[The agreement with Take 2] does allow us to directly sell the game, such as through an online digital service, and we plan to take full advantage of this." That likely means PC gamers are the most likely to get the game.

DEVIL MAY CRY BREAKS EXCLUSIVITY

FANS OF THE *Devil May Cry* series will be pleased to see that the games will also be available on the Xbox 360 and PC after Sony lost the exclusive title for its PS3. Fanboys of Sony have been so upset by this revelation that a petition was drawn up in the hopes of boycotting future releases of Capcom's games, though that's hardly likely to make an impact since Capcom made the decision due to financial considerations. The publisher has released a response stating that by doing this it would be reaching a larger market, which would please more than it would displease.



GAMES DON'T KILL PEOPLE; PEOPLE WITH VIOLENT DISPOSITIONS KILL PEOPLE

RIGHT THEN, IOWA STATE University, we see your three studies claiming that videogames make kiddies violent, and raise you one study that says they don't. Really just repeating what we've known for years already, some enterprising chap with a PhD and a research grant (that's called 'public credibility', boys and girls) from Australia's Swinburne University of Technology has revealed that violent videogames only reinforce pre-existing aggressive tendencies. This means that preternaturally serene Katie can frag away to her little heart's content, but faintly Cro-Magnon Gunthner – with two previous citations for biting – had best be kept clear. Interestingly enough, the study – which monitored the behaviour of 120 children, aged 11-15 – also showed that gaming had a calming effect on hyperactive subjects.

"If you have a quite hyper kid they will come down after playing a bit," said Professor Grant Devilly. "But for the rest of kids, the vast majority, it makes no difference at all in their general aggression rate."

VALVE: LEFT 4 DEAD WILL BEAT COUNTER-STRIKE

UPCOMING TITLE *Left 4 Dead*, by Turtle Rock Studios and Valve Corporation, whose previous collaboration resulted in *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, has been slated to be bigger than *Counter-Strike*. According to Erik Johnson and Doug Lombardi, executives at Valve, *Left 4 Dead* makes no apologies for its superior gameplay with a focus on survival and a cooperative multiplayer structure. Players will take on the roles of four survivors and if need be, another four can join in as the zombies. This means that although it might be bigger than *Counter-Strike*, it's not better and there will still be place for *CS* fans all over the world. *Left 4 Dead* makes use of the Source Engine by Valve and will be available on both PC (via the Steam network) and the Xbox 360.



EIDOS TURNS UP THE STEAM

VALVE CORPORATION'S NIFTY ONLINE content provider Steam has acquired the rights to distribute Eidos titles. The first wave of available games include back catalogue classics *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, *Deus Ex*, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, *Battlestations: Midway*, the entire *Commandos* series, and several *Hitman* titles. To celebrate this momentous event, Eidos also offered bargain-frenzied subscribers a limited time bumper collection including *Just Cause*, *Project: Snowblind*, and *Rogue Trooper*, all for a paltry \$29.95. The companies also announced future plans to release complete franchise sets, including the venerable *Tomb Raider* series, as well as upcoming titles *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* and *Championship Manager 2007*.

"Eidos is delighted to add Steam to our extensive digital distribution network," said Eidos's Tom Marx. "Steam represents an opportunity to distribute our games electronically to millions of gamers around the world."



EPIC AND ID: PIRACY FORCED US ONTO CONSOLES

THE RISE IN RECENT years of increased Internet speeds, coupled with software like BitTorrent and other peer-to-peer networks, has caused an increased amount of piracy. It has gotten so bad that even the professional pirates are now complaining about the ease of getting games and movies off the Net. It is also because of this increase that gaming on the PC is slowly dwindling, as more and more companies focus their efforts on the consoles instead. Studios like Epic and id have announced that popular PC franchise games like *Unreal Tournament 3* and *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* will now be sold on consoles

as well as PC unlike before, and as they say, they are doing this reluctantly. There is hope, however. Countries like Russia are making strides in reforming their laws and getting rid of piracy. Will the rise in piracy kill the PC gaming market? Only time will tell.



NOT A CANNON YOU FLAK MONKEY, A CANON

WHAT ARE THE TEN most important games ever developed? Well, according to Henry Lowood, curator of the History of Science and Technology Collections at Stanford University, and a panel of Very Important Gaming People, they are:

- Spacewar! (1962)
- Star Raiders (1979)
- Zork (1980)
- Tetris (1985)
- SimCity (1989)
- Super Mario Bros. 3 (1990)
- Civilization I/II (1991)
- Doom (1993)
- Warcraft series (1994)
- Sensible World of Soccer (1994)

These titles, they reckon, represent the core of early innovators and genre trendsetters for most, if not all, titles today. "Creating this list," says Lowood, "is an assertion that digital games have a cultural significance and a historical significance." That's all fine and well, but where's *Rogue* or *Ultima*?



PSP
PlayStation Portable

PlayStation 2



THE DEADLIEST WEAPON IN THE WORLD.

Without the wits of a SEAL, guns and grenades are useless lumps of metal.

In battle, surrounded by hostiles, tracers zipping overhead, there's only one thing that will get your team and all innocents out alive. Your decisions.

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SOCOM
U.S. NAVY SEALs
COMBINED ASSAULT

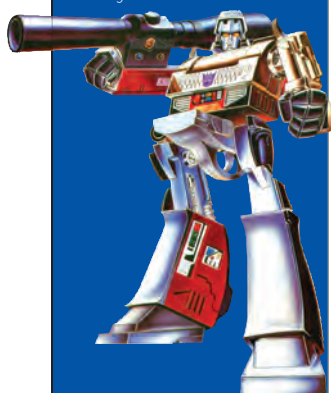
SOCOM
U.S. NAVY SEALs
FIRETEAM BRAVO 2

SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs Combined Assault © 2006-2007 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Published by Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Developed by Zipper Interactive Inc. The U.S. Navy provided technical support, but does not officially endorse this product. All rights reserved. "PS2", "PlayStation 2", and "PS" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "PSP" is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.



According to Reuters, authorities in Mexico City have started a new scheme to curb gun violence in the city. If you turn in a **high-calibre weapon**, you get a **PC**, and for a **handgun**, you can walk away with a **360**.

Although the voice-over for **Megatron** in the upcoming **Transformers** movie will be done by cult-actor **Hugo Weaving**, the original series' **Frank Welker** will voice the game's character. In fact, several original voice actors will be reprising their **Transformers** roles in the game.



A report from Screen Digest revealed that **the MMO market hit \$1 billion in 2006**. Eighty-seven percent of that total came from subscriptions, and the US market contributed just over half. **World of Warcraft** made up 54% of the subscriptions, making it a healthy \$471 million.



A site has set out to find **Miss Videogame**: a sultry lass who also demonstrates some elite gaming skills. You can go and browse www.missvideogame.com to enter, vote or perv.



Microsoft Australia has struck a deal with the government and the **Games Developers Association of Australia** to provide 8,360 development kits for free to small developers. At \$15,000 a pop, that's quite a bargain and a boon for small dev teams in the land down under.



THE 360 TURNS ELITE

BY THE TIME YOU read this, there'll be another shiny black next-gen console on the shelves. Yes, the rumours panned out, and Microsoft is finally set to launch the Xbox 360 Elite: a tricked-out, triple-scoop choc-toffee with sprinkles that'll have vanilla 360 owners surreptitiously weeping with envy.

The Elite comes packing an HDMI port, together with the necessary cabling for some high-definition video and multi-channel surround sound goodness (usually retailing at around R250, that's a pricey little number on its own), as well as a 140GB detachable hard drive. Much like its paler Premium packaged cousin, the Elite ships with a wireless controller and a wired headset (both in a grubby paw-resistant ebony finish), Component and Composite cables, and a one-month Xbox Live Gold trial bundled in for good measure.

Come launch time, the Xbox Live Marketplace will also begin vending new content from New Line, Paramount, Warner Bros., Universal, and

anime producer/distributor ADV Films. This means the latest films and television shows will be available for direct download simultaneous with their DVD retail releases. Someone throw in a food replicator, and there'll be no reason to leave your home, ever.

Good news for those who already own a 360 is that the silver 140GB hard drive will be available as a separate purchase, together with a data transfer cable and software to migrate content from its diminutive predecessor. The Elite's black peripherals, furthermore, will retail separately at the same price as the original white gear.

Meanwhile, Microsoft has confirmed that the Elite won't replace the Core or Premium systems, both of which will continue to be produced. "At the moment there are three models of 360. They are separate models, and the Elite will not influence the other models' availability," said Microsoft spokesperson, Kate Szlendak.

CONSOLES WILL LOSE TO PC, SAY INDUSTRY VETERANS

IF SOMEONE'S OPINION DIFFERS from the general norm, he or she is usually seen as a visionary or as delusional. Which one John Romero is remains to be seen, but the famed developer (whose last significant game was *Doom 2*) feels that consoles are not in such a good condition and will need a major rethink to compete against the PCs of the future.

"Next-gen console is big but its future isn't too bright with the emergence of cheap PC multi-core processors and the big change the PC industry will go through during the next five years to accommodate the new multi-core-centric hardware designs," he told Website Avault. "My prediction is that the game console in the vein of the PS3 and Xbox 360 is going to either undergo a massive rethink or go away altogether." However, he lauded the Wii, saying its unique design puts it apart from a PC and helps it capture the casual market.

"The hardcore gamers are going to either be playing on their PCs or a new PC-like platform that sits in the living room but still serves the whole house over Wi-Fi, even the video signal," he concluded. Lars Butler, from developer Trion World Network and formerly from EA, is more vocal about the death of consoles.

finished WUs:

Working on:
2051
CEARD core

Frames Completed:
42/50000
m:4.8871s/frame

Next Frame End:
3:39 Tue 17 Aug 1976
0d:00h:00m:05s

WU End:
6:26 Fri 18 Aug 1976
2d:16h:47m:01s

SONY FOLDING@HOMESTATION 3

FOLDING@HOME IS A PROTEIN-FOLDING program that wiggles proteins around inside a simulation to try and figure out where and when they stabilise. This helps researchers work on curing various diseases such as Alzheimer disease. Recently, Folding@Home released a version of the program for the PlayStation 3 and already over 30,000 PS3 owners have decided to participate, adding a

significant amount of processing power to the fray.

Gaming Website IGN took a look at how much it probably costs per month if you run Folding@Home 24/7 at 200W per hour while folding, and it totalled to about \$12 on average - not a bad price for curing various diseases.

Folding@Home isn't the only protein-origami program around actually.

Rosetta@Home received over \$10 million from the Gates Foundation in funding last year for HIV research. When asked if Rosetta@Home might consider protein folding on the 360, head scientist and developer David Baker said that, "We have been discussing this idea with Microsoft quite a bit over the past several weeks; I will keep everybody posted."



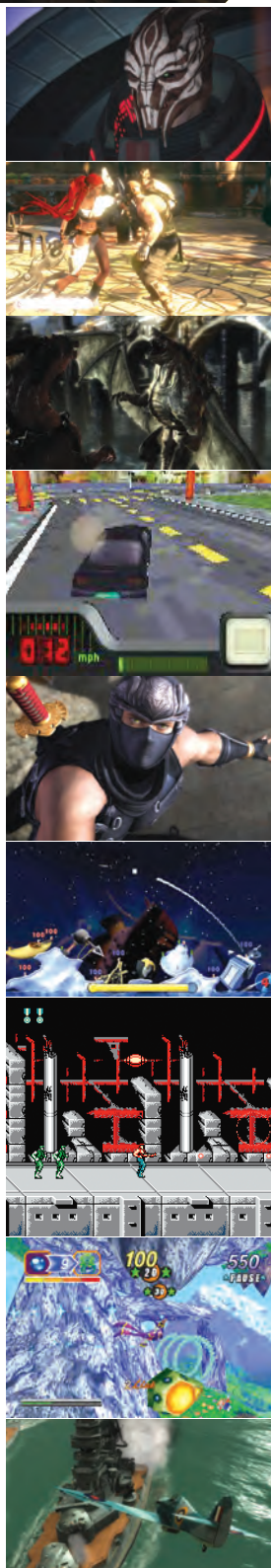
MOVERS & SHAKERS

SOMETIMES YOU JUST HAVE to start at one point and work your way through. For this month's edition of Movers & Shakers, we'll start at the concrete ones and move our way down. That means that first on the list are the games we actually know when to expect. Take 2's **The Darkness** has revealed a release date for Europe – 29 June. However, it's going to be tough getting time to play it, because highly anticipated RPG **Mass Effect** will apparently land on European shores on 22 June. That's good news mostly for 360 owners, because if you own a PS3, you'll have to wait a bit longer for **Heavenly Sword** and **Lair**. Sony said it made a mistake pencilling the games in for a May releases. Instead, a spokesperson said that they are pencilled in for release in 2007.

Moving onto the announcements, **Knight Rider** is coming to mobile screens. Starring Michael Knight and his trusty AI-heavyweight car KITT, the eighties icon will also feature KARR, Goliath, Garthe Knight and helicopter, The Dragon. On top of that, KITT can now be kitted out with weapons. Yeah, we had to use 'kitted'. DS fans can look forward to screaming at their dual screens in frustration. Team Ninja and Tecmo have announced that the tough **Ninja Gaiden** series will be coming to the Nintendo handheld. According to Famitsu, it will be a 3D title, though nothing more has been revealed. The DS and PSP are also soon getting another Worms game. **Worms: Open Warfare** promises to address the problems and bugs that made the first Worms release on portables rather forgettable. Meanwhile, Konami has announced that **Super Contra**, the sequel to Contra, is heading to Xbox Live Arcade, spurned on by the popularity of the first game on the 360's online service. Another classic, though not quite as old, is making a comeback of its own. Sega has announced that Dreamcast game **NiGHTS** will be brought to the Wii. Soon players will be able to take the floating jester through dream worlds, something the Wii's controls are really suited for.

Battlestations: Midway, Eidos's interesting strategy/action hybrid, has made the obvious move after its success on charts across the globe and a sequel has been confirmed, though nothing more has been disclosed. Warner Bros. and Traveler's Tales also finally confirmed that **Lego Batman** is indeed on its way, but once again, we're left to guess what a Lego Joker looks like. Veteran studio Pandemic is also working on a new game: **Saboteur** will be a World War II stealth game where players take on the role of a French Resistance operative. Splinter Cell style? We can only hope, but the game is only due in 2008. Wii fans will hopefully not wait that long for **Guitar Hero 2**. The game has been announced for the platform (but no details on release date or what the controller will be like).

Finally, there are the rumours. Games For Windows editor Jeff Green said on his 1-up blog that the next issue features the **Company of Heroes** sequel. However, THQ has remained mum this. Apparently, **Beautiful Katamari Damacy** is also on its way to next-gen platforms, but Namco hasn't confirmed this. And dealer lists have created a lot of speculation. Play.com listed a **Condemned 2** placeholder, while EBGames and Gamestop listed **Time Crisis 4** for the PS3.



BUDGET TOP 20



1. Age of Empires Collector's Edition



2. Age of Mythology Gold Edition



3. Rise of Nations Gold Edition



4. Brothers in Arms Earned in Blood



5. Splinter Cell Chaos Theory



6. CSI: Miami



7. Dungeon Siege Legends of Aranna



8. Prince of Persia The Two Thrones



9. Playboy The Mansion Gold Edition



10. Rainbow Six: Lockdown



11. The Settlers: Heritage of Kings



12. Zoo Tycoon



13. Chessmaster 10th Edition



14. Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002



15. Silent Hunter III



16. Rayman 10th Anniversary



17. CSI: Dark Motives



18. Far Cry



19. Combat Flight Simulator 2



20. Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

R99 each



Namco Bandai has started to develop arcade games using the **PS3's cell chip**. This is the first time that the processor will be used outside of the PS3. In the past, the publisher has used PS2-based boards for its arcade machines.

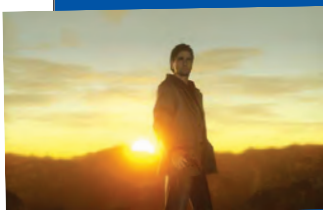


When Russia actually buys your games and not only pirate them, you should give the country proper support. Arena.net knows this and has released all of its **Guild Wars** games with full Russian language support.

id Software's Kevin Cloud has confirmed that **Quake Wars** will not support cross-platform play across the PC, 360 and PS3. He said that it could be done, but doing so would create challenges to balance the game for everyone. Rather not delay it for that!



Co-founder and former managing director of **Remedy Entertainment** (Max Payne, Alan Wake), Samuli Syvähuoko, has formed a new developer called **Recoil Games**. The studio will develop games for PC and next-gen platforms and is already working on a new original IP for the platforms.



The district attorney from Sacramento, US, has decided not to press charges against a radio station or its employees after a woman died during one of its contests. Holding her **wee for a Wii** in a contest hosted by the station, the woman consumed over 7l of water and eventually died from resulting complications.



ROCK OUT WITH ROCK BAND

MTV SCORED BIG WHEN it decided to buy developer Harmonix, who has proven itself very capable with its music-centric games *Amplitude* and *Frequency*. When Harmonix and peripheral maker RedOctane released *Guitar Hero*, the ability to be a Rock God was suddenly within the reach of anyone who had ever picked up an air guitar. There is even a mobile version of *Guitar Hero* on the way, though we have no idea how that'll actually work. Now, in development for the PS3 and 360, *Rock Band* is set to change to face of garage bands forever. The game will support

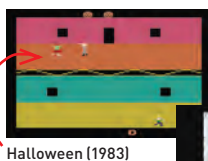
up to two guitars (one lead, one bass), a drum kit and a microphone, allowing you to create your own rock band offline or online. Think *SingStar* meets *Guitar Hero* meets *Percussion Freaks* complete with online play. No pricing on the peripherals yet, but no doubt it should be reasonable in light of the *Guitar Hero* controller. Harmonix says it even has a unique solution to avoid lag during online play, and players will be able to buy songs online and this time the music tracks will be performed by the original artists instead of cover bands. Rock On.



ASK A NINJA WINS AWARD!

HOW DO YOU PHRASE a strongly worded complaint to a storekeeper who has wronged you? The answer, according to hit Internet sensation 'Ask A Ninja', is to say, "I'm a Ninja." Brainchild of comedians Kent Nichols and Douglas Sarine, 'Ask A Ninja' was awarded 'Most Creative Video' at the YouTube 2006 Video Awards in a surprise triumph over perhaps YouTube's biggest celebrity 'Lonelygirl15', who only finished fourth behind 'Ask A Gay Man' and 'Chad Vader'. Every week, 'Ask A Ninja' answers viewer questions e-mailed in, as only Ninja can. Other winners include UK band 'OK Go!' for its incredibly popular homemade music videos.

THE EVOLUTION OF: SURVIVAL HORROR



Halloween (1983)

Sweet Home (1989)



Alone in the Dark (1992)



Clock Tower (1995)



Resident Evil (1996)



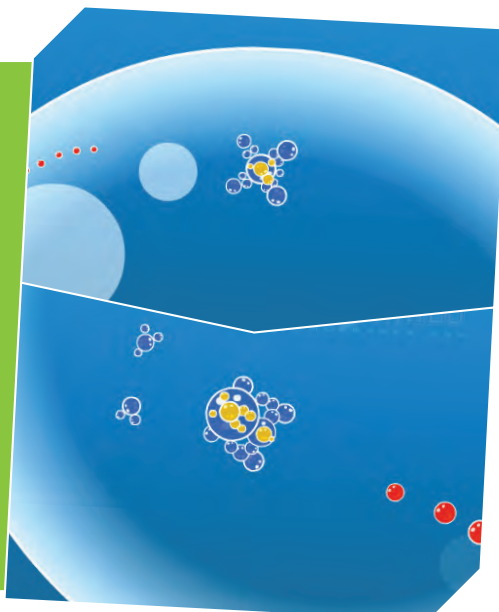
Silent Hill (1999)

FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

BUBBLE TANKS

[<http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/369800>]

IT LOOKS UNASSUMING AND simple, but *Bubble Tanks* is actually quite intense once you get into the thick of it. The premise is basic: you float around inside bubbles and shoot other bubble 'tanks'. You collect the bubbles enemies drop, and once you have enough, your own bubble tank evolves and gets bigger, more powerful with more firepower. There are quite a few levels of transformation, each one better than the last. Eventually you'll be fighting huge bubble bosses inside later bubbles, dodging the incoming red bubble shots. What makes *Bubble Tanks* fun is the evolutionary aspect, and while there are quite a few evolutions, you have no direct control over what you'll be evolving to - which is a shame. Sooner than you'd like, the evolution stops and you're stuck at the highest level travelling from bubble to bubble killing more boss characters. We're hoping the author develops a sequel where you can choose what type of evolution you want. For more Flash game goodness, check out *Kongregate* (www.kongregate.com), which houses some of the best we've seen yet (*Newgrounds.com* tends to have a lot of garbage these days). We recommend *War Bears* and *Gamma Bros* (the latter actually lets you win Cards that show up on your profile at *Kongregate*).





FBI INVESTIGATES SECOND LIFE GAMBLING

AS SECOND LIFE BECOMES more popular and more businesses and people join the masses of people playing, it was inevitable that something would happen to grab the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States. This time, it is the issue of online gambling in this virtual world. At the moment, laws on gambling are quite clear in the US, but laws on gambling in a videogame with virtual money are not. The FBI aims to resolve this issue and Linden Lab, who in its licensing agreement states that it's not responsible for what goes on, has opened its doors to the agency. The very fact that players are gambling with Linden Dollars, which can be purchased with real currency, is at the centre of the controversy. However, things aren't as clear-cut, since US laws are so unclear on this type of situation. This also means that Linden Lab will be investigated to see if it promotes this issue in the game.

GREENSTONE AND WWE MERGE FORCES

LOCAL GAMES DISTRIBUTOR GREENSTONE has merged with a larger player in the industry, WWE, marking another event in an industry that has seen several big changes recently. WWE is the official distributor of Eidos, Atari, Sega and Square-Enix, while Greenstone brings with it smaller publishers such as Midas, Ghostlight and Monte Cristo, the latter the publisher of recently-released *Silverfall*. The move will strengthen WWE's mid and low budget ranges, while Greenstone's triple-A releases will benefit from WWE's marketing muscle. The new company will continue to trade as WWE.

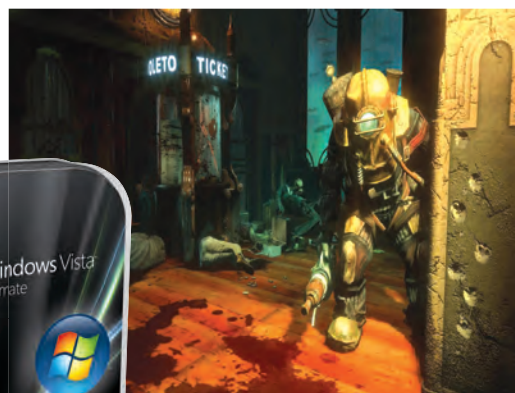
BIOSHOCK DEV: VISTA WILL HELP PC MARKET GROW UP

AS VISTA SLOWLY MAKES its ascent to topple XP, forecasters have already spotted that in 2007 the sales of PCs have increased by 10.5%, which if you put it into units comes to over 255 million sold. This has also seen a rise in OS sales. According to Microsoft, this could be due to the release of Vista. However, is it the only reason?

For the people at Irrational Games, who are responsible for Bioshock, there seems to be a general consensus that Vista makes gaming more accessible.

"The best thing about DX10 and Vista for me is not better graphics. It's the push Microsoft is making to make PC games easier for the user to buy, install and understand," Irrational's Kevin Levine told GamesIndustry.biz. The new features that compare a machine's rating to the game's required rating make troubleshooting so much easier. When one adds the new Games For Windows network, which is based on Xbox Live and comes complete with gamer cards, and the fact that Vista is a lot more secure compared to the previous OS, we may find that this could cause a break in the ever-growing piracy problem and bring PC gaming back to its roots. Vista really does take the cake, not to mention the fact that Windows Vista comes with support for DirectX 10.

However, the guys at Microsoft Watch are still sceptical about the latest sales figures and claim that Microsoft is counting four



months of sales into its launch month figures by adding all the pre-orders to the regular sales. At another research institute, Gartner, people are saying that sales of Vista should have been a lot more considering the amount of PCs sold compared to the 20 million copies of Vista. Whatever the case may be, Vista has still broken the previous launch month record set by Windows XP by three million units, and with the added gaming support, Vista could very well establish itself as the dominant OS, in the gaming world at least, in about two to three years.

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Publishing behemoth **EA** finally went the extra step with its music and launched a label of its own. Collaborating with label **Nettwerk One Music**, the new label is called **Artwerk**, and its first signed artist is Junkie XL.



Atari Chairman Bruno Bonnell, who has been with the company for 24 years, has decided to call it quits and pursue something else. He will be replaced by Patrick Leleu, Atari's chairman and CEO. Bonnell didn't reveal why he left or what he plans to do next.

Rockstar's publisher, **Take-Two**, might go up for sale. The company admitted that this might be an option to fight off aggressive shareholders trying to replace management.



Peter Molyneux, head honcho at Lionhead and formerly Bullfrog, has been awarded the 'Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres'. In English, that's the Knighthood in the Order of Arts and Letters. It was awarded by the French Government for "recognition of significant contributions to the arts, literature, or the propagation of these fields."



Even though **Microsoft** abandoned the **Xbox** for the new **360**, it's still going after mod-chippers of the original platform. Recently a 27-year-old Hawaiian man was sentenced to four months in prison after pleading guilty to distributing modded Xbox consoles.



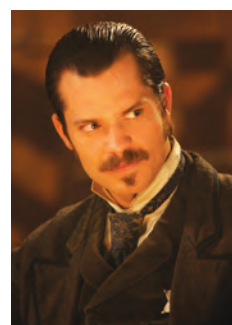
THE DS RISES AGAIN AND AGAIN

WHILE ROLLING XBOX-, PS3- and Wii-powered behemoths shell one another from fortified camps, it seems that the hotfooted mobile infantry is quietly winning the war. Latest sales statistics show that where the Xbox is clinging ever more precariously to its lead in the next-gen battle with unit shifts of just over 10 million, the combined retail might of Nintendo's DS and DS Lite consoles adds up to around 40 million. With Sony's PSP trailing steadily behind with (nonetheless respectable) sales of 20 million, there's no denying that Nintendo's handheld is a formidable player.

In a recent report from games industry snoops DFC Intelligence, entitled 'The Market for Portable Video Games', analyst David Cole surmises that, "The DS has the potential to be the best-selling interactive entertainment platform ever." See, while Sony and Microsoft

spin-doctors have dominated the media with their number-crunching powerhouses, the DS has dominated the market with its quaint dual screens and range of colour schemes. International sales figures show that the DS has been the highest-selling gaming platform for six months now, and is expected to surpass even the PS2's installed base in Japan.

Meanwhile, DS owners in Australia can look forward to some free online gaming action - telecommunications giant Telstra has agreed to provide over 1,000 wireless hotspots nationwide. "Beginning with free access at participating destinations," said Rose Lappin, Nintendo Australia's Director of Sales and Marketing, "we have removed one of the major barriers that have kept people from going online to play games." Lucky fish.



GOW AND HITMAN MOVIES KICK OFF

ON THE 27TH OF March, production got underway on a movie based on the *Hitman* series of videogames. It stars Timothy Olyphant of *Die Hard* and *Deadwood* fame. Locations include South Africa and the film will be directed by Xavier Gens. Unfortunately, details on the plot have been kept secret with everyone involved keeping quiet. The other title, which, is in planning at the moment, will be based on the popular *Gears of Wars* franchise by Epic Games. New Line Cinema signed the deal to develop it and has already recruited Stuart Beattie, who is responsible for movies like *Derailed* and *Collateral*, to write the screenplay. The lead designer of the game, Cliff Bleszinski, will act as executive producer and this will hopefully keep the movie true to its roots. These are just two movie titles based on games underway, with many more projects planned for the future.

FREE MOD OF THE MONTH

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA:
BEYOND THE RED LINE [FREESPACE 2]

[www.game-warden.com/bsg/]

THIS IS FRACKING SWEET! A few fans of the new *Battlestar Galactica* series have gotten together to work on a standalone total conversion for the (award-winning) *Freespace 2*. You don't need *Freespace 2* to play it, though. It's a standalone and everything you need to play is in the download (the same goes for the recently released demo). Totally free, *Beyond the Red Line* is made by fans for the fans and since they aren't making any profit off it, they won't get sued to oblivion. There is no estimate yet for when it will be completed, though. "When it's done," is all the developers are saying. The original *Freespace 2* was an arcade space shooter and as such didn't have Newtonian 'real space' physics, so *Beyond the Red Line* won't have it either. They have made some new additions to the game that let you pull off some stunts you see in the show. Multiplayer is also planned and includes Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, King of the Hill, Gauntlet missions and perhaps some co-op missions. In the demo, you can fly the Viper Mk II, the Viper Mk VII as well as a Raptor (not the dinosaur). More ships might be included in the main release. The demo is fun and gets across what the developers are thinking, but the *Freespace 2* engine is starting to look its age.





CONSOLE WATCH

ANOTHER MONTH, ANOTHER MONTH'S worth of 'He Said, She Said' and various console manufacturers taking cheap shots at each other while the fanboys from different sides whoop and holler like baboons. Ah yes, this is what gaming is all about: trying to make other people stop enjoying their consoles, and forcing them to love yours.

Kicking things off, *Newsweek* columnist N'Gai Croal declared that the Xbox 360 wouldn't win the console wars. His article "Redmond, We Have A Problem, Or, What's Wrong With the Xbox 360" (which follows his "Tokyo, We Have A Problem, Or, What's Wrong With the PlayStation 3"), acknowledges the advantages Microsoft has (a year's head start, a large library of games, a cheaper SKU, etc.), but it also points out a few shortcomings (the Wii blocking the 360's mass-market moves until the PS3 is cheap enough for people to want it).

A.G. Edwards analyst Bill Kreher claims that the 360 will lead the market through 2009 and that the PS3 will fade away. Naturally, Sony disagrees.

Meanwhile, Microsoft dropped the ball when some of its Xbox Live telephone

support staff were caught giving away private information to hackers. Using some fancy wordplay and 'social engineering', hackers managed to get sensitive information such as gamer tags. A few users reported that their credit cards had been maxed out by purchases they had not made themselves. Microsoft issued a statement that there was no security breach, but now admits that its support staff was ill prepared for social engineering attacks and are being re-trained.

Oddly enough, Microsoft isn't so anti-Sony that it won't consider a Blu-ray drive for the 360. UK Xbox head Neil Thompson told BBC News, "Whatever format wins, it is likely we will offer a solution."

From the Sony side comes comments that Microsoft has "got the hardcore gamer" and that it's a bad thing. Sony America's Senior Director of Corporate Communications, David Karraker, mentioned, "...the challenge is how do you grow the consumer outside of the hardcore demographic."

As those who want a Wii clamour into stores but can't find any, Nintendo's George Harrison made sure nobody is thinking that perhaps the



(international) stock shortage is on purpose.

"We have worldwide territories that are all competing over the available production. Nintendo is making the best decisions that they can about which products get shipped to which market and when."

Rumours are starting to circulate about a Component to HDMI adapter for the 360 - not that we can figure out why anyone cares. Deutsche Bank analyst Jeetil Patel blurted out that recent console sales (PS3, 360) are disappointing, noting that a price cut for the PS3 is "critical" in order to "stimulate" the market.

Price cuts for the PSP are on the way in the US, dropping the Core PSP pack from \$199 to \$169. No word on when this will affect pricing in South Africa. Microsoft has defended the \$180 price tag on the 120GB HDD for the 360, saying the price is totally fair.

On the brighter side of things, the National Academy of Video Game Testers and Reviewers Corp. announced the nominees for its sixth annual awards, with Microsoft receiving 29 nominations (in 2002, Nintendo set the record with 41 nominations).

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- 4 Def Jam: Icon
- 5 Marvel: Ultimate Alliance



XBOX 360

- 1 Crackdown
- 2 Brian Lara Cricket 2007
- 3 Def Jam: Icon
- 4 Gears of War
- 5 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter



PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Medal of Honor Vanguard
- 2 Burnout Dominator
- 3 God Hand
- 4 Final Fantasy XII
- 5 EA Sports Cricket 07



PC

- 1 Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars
- 2 S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadow of Chernobyl
- 3 Supreme Commander
- 4 Left Behind: Eternal Forces
- 5 Infernal



PSP

- 1 Ghost Rider
- 2 Sid Meier's Pirates!
- 3 GTA Vice City Stories
- 4 TOCA Race Driver 3
- 5 Arthur & The Invisibles

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject [May Caption].



MAY CONTEST
NAG'S LAME
ATTEMPT:
"If this is Sparta, we're very afraid."



MARCH
WINNER
"It's a bird! It's a plane! It's super car! Now available at your nearest dealer with bullet proof tyres."

Moses
Matsepane

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!

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WE NEED A HERO

Every month, in honour of our new favourite TV show, *Heroes*, we'll hide the mysterious mark of the heroes somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [Heroes May]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a fabulous prize from our new sponsor, Trust! See details at the top of the page. And remember: Save the cheerleader, save the world!

LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Matthew Hughes, p. 38



CALENDAR

MAY RELEASE LIST

DAY	GAME	PLATFORM
1	Forza 2	360
1	King's Quest Collection	PC
1	Leisure Suit Larry Collection	PC
1	Poiche Quest Collection	PC
1	Space Quest Collection	PC
4	Spider-Man 3: The Movie	Multi
11	Tony Hawk Project 8	PSP
11	Command and Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	360
18	Wildlife Park 2 Gold Pack	PC
18	Aim 2	PC
18	Ascension to the Throne	PC
25	Pirates of the Caribbean 3	Multi
TBA	Rainbow 6: Vegas	PS3, PSP
TBA	The Darkness	PS3
TBA	NBA 2K7	PS3
TBA	God of War 2 Only R499.95. Save R60! @ www.kalahari.net	PS2
TBA	SOCOM US Navy Seals: Combined Assault + Headset	PS2
TBA	SpongeBob: Battle for Volcano Island	PS2
TBA	Demon Chaos	PS2
TBA	Dancing Stage Supernova	PS2
TBA	Shin Megami Tensei	PS2
TBA	Global Defence Force	PS2
TBA	Armored Core: Last Raven	PS2
TBA	Wild Arms 4	PS2
TBA	Panzer Front	PS2
TBA	Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters	PSP
TBA	SOCOM Fireteam Bravo 2	PSP
TBA	Death Junior 2	PSP
TBA	Heatseeker	PSP
TBA	Puzzle Quest	PSP
TBA	The Cube	PSP
TBA	Aces of War	PSP
TBA	Exit 2	PSP
TBA	Gurumin	PSP
TBA	Marvel Trading Card Game	PC
TBA	Yu Gi Oh: Online Duel Evolution	PC
TBA	Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar Pre-order for only R357.26 @ www.kalahari.net	PC
TBA	Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar Special Edition Pre-order for only R357.46 @ www.kalahari.net	PC
TBA	Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar Game Time Cards	PC
TBA	Hospital Tycoon	PC



1

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2

3



4

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Carnage.LAN Cape Town
(www.langames.co.za)

5/6



7

8



9

10



11

EVENT:
Elimination Pretoria
(www.langames.co.za)

12/13

EVENT:
Mayhem Open LAN
(www.langames.co.za)

18

EVENT:
DNA LAN Port Elizabeth
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
Organized Chaos Cape Town
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
Insomnia Pretoria
(www.langames.co.za)

19/20

EVENT:
Liberty May Benoni
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23

24

25



26/27

EVENT:
The Lair LAN Edenvale
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Game Developers Conference

07

After the demise, or change in approach, that E3 took last year, several other game expos have risen to take on some of the audience left out in the cold. However, few of them can claim the influence that the Game Developers Conference has, especially since the show has in the past been the launch platform for such major names as the Xbox. This year, the organisers doubled the floor space and all three console manufacturers, as well as anyone who is anyone (or no one), showed up for what is likely to be the US gaming industry's biggest bash this year. It was an eventful GDC, with a keynote from Shigeru Miyamoto, new impressive announcements from Sony and Lionhead, finally showing more from *Fable 2*, to name a few things. We can't fit all of it into these pages, but here are a few of the highlights of the show.

MRS MIYAMOTO AND THE GAMERS

There was no chance that anything would manage to garner more attention than the Shigeru Miyamoto keynote – his last such appearance at GDC was eight years ago. Nevertheless, Phil Harrison's presentation for Sony didn't stand back and had many of its own surprises. Then again, the two were distinctly different. In fact, the only thing you could really compare is that Miyamoto and Harrison used a Wii and PS3 respectively to run their presentations.

"If we can convert my wife, I believe we can convert anyone!" Miyamoto exclaimed near the end of his talk, having spent just over an hour delving into the philosophy behind his and Nintendo's game design vision. He started his keynote by introducing the Wife-o-meter. Apparently, his wife didn't like games, no matter what, but over time, she grew fond of them, eventually playing herself. This, though, was a matter of the right games and devices. First, Miyamoto noted, she became a spectator when his daughter was playing *Ocarina of Time*. However, it was *Animal Crossing*, *Brain Age* and *Nintendogs* that converted her. This was just one part in a much longer explanation that boiled down to this: there are more people who could play games and enjoy them, but the industry

seems too eager to develop nicer graphics and 'innovation', ultimately alienating a larger audience. He explored the process in designing the Wii's remote, spoke about a poetry museum he's involved with that uses DS handhelds and floor-mounted LCD screens to bring young and old together, and ultimately made an argument for Nintendo and his philosophy that games should foremost be about fun.

Harrison's speech, on the other hand, was a quick and surgical move to bring confidence back to the PlayStation 3. He started with the concept of Game 3.0, which he explained is "about emergent entertainment powered by the audience at the centre of entertainment." Instead of all those buzzwords, he should have simply shown *LittleBigPlanet*, which made his idea perfectly clear in its user-creation system, and Home, Sony's social interaction world that is sure to lure many people online. These were demonstrated during the keynote and within the space of an hour Sony had not one but two upcoming titles that can be bandied together under the 'killer app' moniker. While not nearly as informative, thoughtful or interesting as Miyamoto's presentation, it's a matter of apples and oranges. Both keynotes delivered.



“You’ve given me a lot of faith in the future of our industry.”

Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo, on the IGF nominees



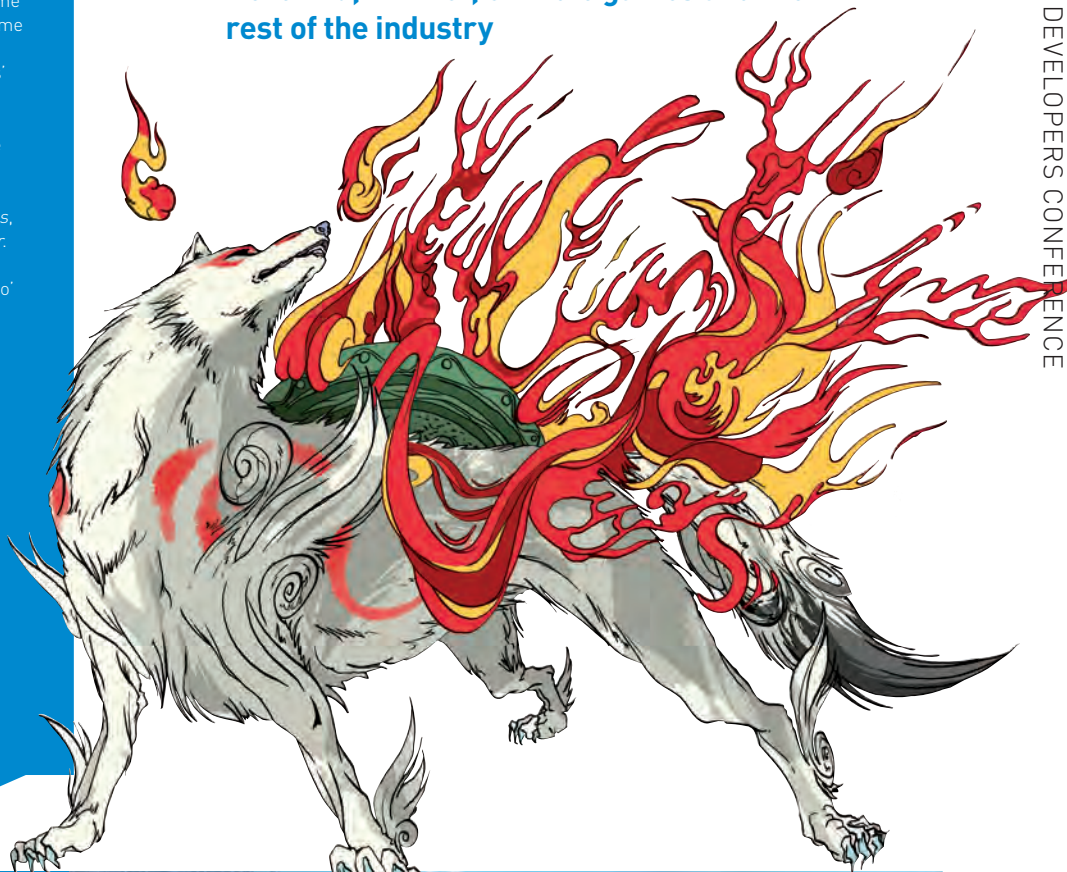
REAPING THE AWARDS

Everyone in the industry is ready to hand out awards for something or another, which is why we always end up with quite a few 'Game of The Year' games. However, obviously some awards are more important than others are. The 'Game Developers Choice Awards' (GDCA) and 'Independent Game Festival' (IGF) carry such influence, thanks to being associated with GDC. This year, there were several heavyweights trying to win the top spots, but the GDCA 'Best Game' award, given to the likes of *Shadow of the Colossus*, *GTA 3* and *Half-Life 2*, went to *Gears of War*. Epic's game also picked up the awards for technology and visual arts. The 'New Studio' award went to Iron Lore (*Titan Quest*), but its only competition was really Ready at Dawn (*Daxter*). It was a tougher crowd for *Okami*, which beat the likes of *LocoRoco*, *Viva Piñata* and *Rayman* for the 'Character Design' award. However, the real fight was in the writing department, where *Twilight Princess* managed to collect more votes than *Oblivion*, *Bully*, *Dreamfall* and *Sam & Max Episode 1*.

The IGF awards, which have been catering for the indie scene since 1999, awarded *HL2 Mod Weekend Warrior* the Best Mod prize, while upcoming *Castle Crashers* and *Everyday Shooter* took the 'Excellence in Visuals' and 'Game Design Innovation' awards respectively. *Everyday Shooter* also nabbed 'Excellence in Audio', but the \$20,000 'Seumas McNally Grand Prize' was given to side-scroller *Aquaria*.

■ ■ We need to have the games industry put on the right pants... we're starting to notice that other cheek and how hard it is to walk without that other cheek. ■ ■

Derek Yu, Bit Blot, on indie games and the rest of the industry



GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES!

GDC is, after all, the Game Developers Conference, so it's the place to be to see the latest in engines and middleware that will hit the market soon. Crytek completely dominated the press' attention, largely thanks to the *Crysis* affiliation, when it started to promote CryENGINE2 to developers and interested parties. It truly is impressive, but the bigger news is that *Crysis* will ship with most of the development tools included for free, allowing indie developers and modders to create a game themselves. According to Crytek, terms can be worked out if those developers want turn their games commercial. Part of the demonstration featured the world building tools, which resonated the same impressiveness *Far Cry* did a few years ago. The developer also said that 360 and PS3 versions of the engine was in the works, but that this doesn't mean *Crysis* would appear on consoles.

The PSSG engine, tailored for the PS3, was also showcased at the conference, including a demonstration of the engine's outdoor environment. Sony's Edge developer tools caused rumbles among the developers at the audience, while NVIDIA took the opportunity to announce six new development tools geared towards Vista games.



THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE WEIRD

Every game show comes with its own weird and wonderful things, but also disappointments and a few foot-in-mouth moments. Maxis's Chris Hecker made the biggest waves when he declared that, "The Wii is a piece of shit!" He explained that Nintendo treats games like toys and isn't serious about giving developers the power they need to take gaming further, and said the Wii is just two GameCubes put together with duct tape. Many disagreed, including Maxis's publisher EA, which quickly announced that it didn't share Hecker's views. Hecker was even forced to apologise, though he threw in the extra comment that he thought he was talking for himself. Guess not. Developer/Publisher relationships also were under the spotlight when Lee Jacobson from Midway explored the dishonesty of developers. He mentioned examples of developers pocketing money and lying about their cash spent or even lying about whether they own an engine or not. The best, though, was where he went to a developer to see teams A and B, just to discover that they were the same people, only in different clothes.

Overall, the real low points came from Nintendo and Microsoft, which both didn't really announce anything new. That meant that Sony easily became the winner of GDC with its unveiling of Home on its network service, not to mention the delicious-looking *LittleBigPlanet*. Independent developers, as always, took a lot from GDC and also made quite a few impactful comments. Manifesto Games' Greg Costikyan said that indie games were still treated like a pimple on the industry's ass. However, other developers disagreed, with *Aquaria* developer Bit Blot's Derek Yu replying that the industry is starting to take note of the scene. Well, at least game news writers have. They all agreed, though, that there should be more ways to bring indie games to mass

markets. Peter Molyneux had his own little victory with *Fable 2*, which dominated the Microsoft games at the show. He unveiled the game's special feature: a dog that will follow the player everywhere and defend him against anything. It sounded silly, but the animal's behaviour quickly captured attendee imaginations. Strange, yes, but evidently very involving as well.

The weird, though, somehow takes the cake anyway. On show at the event was *Virtually Jenna*, a game starring porn icon Jenna Jameson. As you might imagine, it's hardcore (and not in a hardcore gamer sense), but the interesting bit is that the game charges a monthly subscription fee. It's not an MMO, but it is continually updated with new things you and Jenna can do together. And you thought hentai games on the DS were the cutting edge of interactive porn. The most interesting 'different' thing happening, however, was Jonathan Mann from blog Gamejew fulfilling his dream of showing his idol Shigeru Miyamoto his appreciation. How? Well, after many failed attempts he finally cornered Shiggy and sang him a song he wrote to show it. Apparently, the father of *Mario* enjoyed it and the Gamejew is very happy. See? Dreams can come true! Even silly ones...

■ ■ We think this is a very powerful way to bring community not just to games, but to other forms of lifestyle and entertainment. ■ ■

Phil Harrison, Sony, on the PS3's Home application

■ ■ Piracy has pushed id as being multiplatform. ■ ■

Todd Hollenstead, id Software, on *Quake Wars* now also appearing on consoles



SEEN AT GDC 07

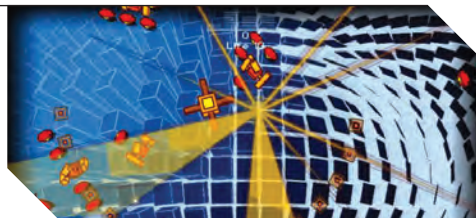
KILLZONE

A few sites were shown *Killzone* (no '2') behind closed doors and they all agree it's pretty neat, but came across more like an engine demo. Still very work-in-progress, at least the game seems to be underway. More details soon?



EVERYDAY SHOOTER

Think *Blast Factor* or *Geometry Wars*, but more about music and just so much cooler. The game's designer describes it as if God made you a pixel and you can't get the music out of your heart. Because, you see, you are a pixel in the game acting just plain groovy.



SUPER MARIO GALAXY

According to Shigeru Miyamoto, elements of the rumoured *Mario 128* found its way into both *Pikmin* and *Super Mario Galaxy*. He then showed a video where Mario traversed many 'spheres' in a galaxy of various sizes and shapes, featuring all kinds of challenges and monsters. It looks cool and will be out this year.



SINGSTAR PS3

Hmmm, yes, you will be able to belt it out on your PS3 by June. Apart from song downloads, the new *SingStar* will also support recording videos of you getting jiggy, which you can then upload to the SingStar service. It would sound stupid, if it wasn't for how stupidly popular YouTube had become...



FABLE 2

Imagine a game where you can buy everything. That's one of the things Peter Molyneux covered with the long awaited and rather secretive sequel to *Fable*. Gone are the concept art impressions – *Fable 2* looks good.



LITTLEBIGPLANET

From the people who developed *Rag Doll Kung Fu* comes an innovative platformer that will not only encourage lots of cooperative play, but has a pretty sweet content creation system that you'll fall in love with. Has the PS3's first killer app finally dawned?



CASTLE CRASHERS

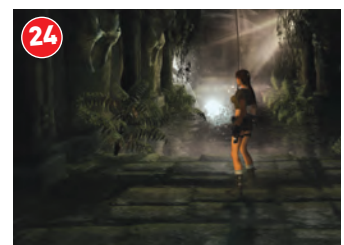
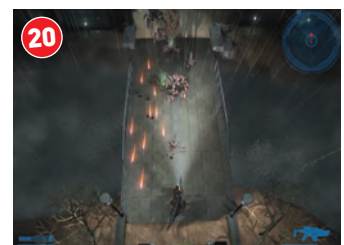
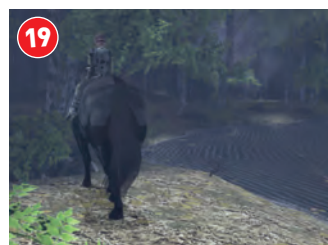
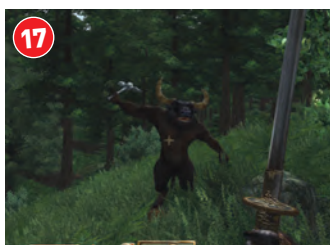
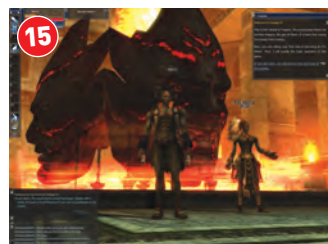
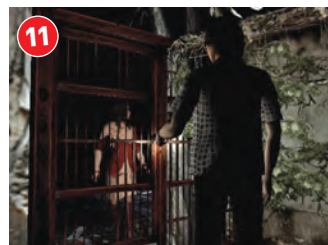
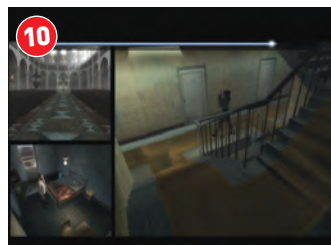
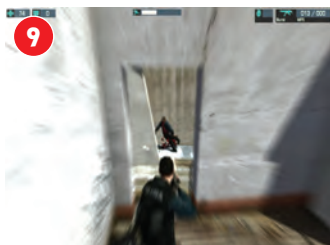
Coming from the folks who developed *Alien Hominid*, this XBLA title will apparently only see the light in 2008 and is still far from ready. However, developer The Behemoth told Joystiq that it plans to make use of the larger size limit announced for games on the service.



NAME THAT GAME

WE'RE KICKING OFF A new competition this month aimed at all you gaming aficionados out there who know their stuff. Every month, you will find this page in NAG with 24 screenshots from games, old and new. If you can tell us what the 24 games are, you could win an awesome prize courtesy of Megarom! E-mail the names of all 24 games to nagcomps@tidemedia.co.za, and be sure to include your contact information and postal details. If you are the only person who gets them all right, you automatically win! If many people get them all right, then that month we will pick a totally random winner from the group that nailed all 24 games. If no one gets them all, the one who names most wins. We're kicking things off a little easy this month to get you used to the idea, but next month may stump even the most diligent of the digital warriors!

[Competition closes when the next issue of NAG hits shelves, and so on and so forth]



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NAG is looking for freelance writers who cover the local gaming scene. Maybe it's a large LAN. Maybe it's an online tournament. Maybe it's a game launch. Maybe you visited Fiji and witnessed what gaming is like there. Maybe it's your blind neighbor who got 5 stars on every song, on Expert, in Guitar Hero 2. If it's about games, we're like to hear about it.

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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

GEEK REVOLT

I HAVE A LOT OF ground to cover this time, so I'll be brief and to the point in this column, so try to keep up. To make my point, I'm going to make this personal. When I was in Matric at the tender age of 16, more by fluke than by any academic brilliance on my part, I was working part-time at a cyber café that was literally right outside the school gates across the street. I worked at the cyber café so that I could play all the newest games there, on PCs that far outstripped my own personal one at the time (AMD K6-2 for the win). The cyber café in question had a great community and tons of friends. One day, one of the cricket players at the school I went to decided to make my life hell just because I was 'nerd' enough to go to the cyber café all the time. I'll call the cricket player in question Jock McJock, because that's what he was: a Jock. I'll get around to explaining the criteria for being a Jock in a second.

So, this Jock McJock would every day mock and insult me because I 'played computer games' and was such a nerd and dork for doing so. I didn't give a shit, truth be told, because I'm a gamer and what some Jock says doesn't bother me. After all, I have the luxury of having enough higher mental capacity to actually play games, whereas your average Jock has a hard enough time getting his cellphone to play the newest TrueTone ringtone of the newest excuse for music. I'm Batman, they're not.

The problem is that Jocks now also play games, and I place the blame rather squarely on the shoulders of Sony. The PlayStation and its sequel made it hip, cool and 'okay' to play games. Sony expressed to the masses that gaming is no longer a thing only dorks and nerds do, and so the Jocks got themselves a TeeVeeGames PlayStation and before anyone knew it, gaming was cool enough for Jocks.

On a related note, and to finish my little preamble, the same Jock who mocked me for playing games eventually (after I had matriculated) got a job at the same cyber café and to this day still plays *Counter-Strike*. It was actually *Counter-Strike* that made him play games in the first place, because it had guns and you shoot other people and the game is "totally not faggy." True quote, I'm not smart enough to make this stuff up.

And so, we get to the main point of my rant today, something I've suddenly started feeling quite strong about.

Just because a Jock now plays games doesn't mean he has stopped being a Jock. What we have now is an abundance of Jock gamers, and they are ruining it for the rest of us. On a side note, e-sport is an equal culprit in making gaming less fun for those of us who loved it in the first place and didn't need some company to come telling us that gaming is cool enough for school now. E-sport turns gamers into Jocks and imbues them with the same attitudes and jackassness that Jocks seem to be born with (although I believe Jockdom is an indoctrination, which should be considered child abuse in the perfect world).

I have a simple method for identifying Jocks. A Jock is someone who gets confounded and confused when he is confronted by someone who doesn't enjoy the same things as he does. Walk up to a Jock, any Jock, and explain to him that you have no interest in sports, fast cars, or hot chicks. The classic Jock will first just stand there and stare at you as if you've just dropped from Mars, and then eventually regain enough composure to retort with an insult or two. "Wat, is jy a moffie?"

The influence of Jocks on gaming is far-reaching. These days, games are being made easier to accommodate the Jock who doesn't 'have the time' to master a challenging game and would rather just rock out to *Call of Duty 2* because you can't even really die in it unless you're really stupid. Games are being watered down to make sure they can appeal to the masses, and the

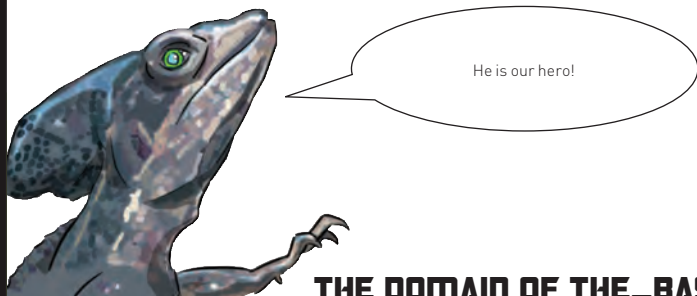
masses don't want to be challenged - they want to be entertained.

The upcoming Sony Home for the PlayStation 3 isn't going to help either. Sony has already said that it's creating "online virtual worlds appealing to the masses" with it, and even go so far as to say that it's "making it less geeky and nerdy, letting everyone enjoy it." Great, that's all we need: Jocks online saying 'cock' repeatedly in the public areas of Sony Home. Screw you Sony: I'm proud of being a gamer, a geek and a nerd, and I'd appreciate it if you'd stop popularising and glamourising it.

And as a gamer, a nerd and a geek, I'm saying it's about time we put our foot down and stop taking crap from the Jocks who are infesting our hobby, experiences and perhaps even life. At school, I worked hard to avoid Jocks and people like them, but now Sony is intent on bringing them into my home. Sony isn't the only culprit in this - Xbox Live also has its fair share of beer-swilling rugby players who are "liking to be racing" in some *PGR3*.

The whole point behind gaming is that after school and after work, gamers can go to their real jobs and experience interactive worlds and adventures far beyond what any other medium can bring you. I see no reason why I have to share it with the same Jocks who never appreciated it in the first place. **NAG**





THE DOMAIN OF THE BASILISK

by Anton Lines

GAMING: GOING DOWN THE TUBE

CAPETONIANS AND DURBANITES OFTEN complain about the pace of life in Johannesburg, the frenzied rat race of the country's economic centre. However, after spending a few months in London, one comes to realise just how easy-going the atmosphere in South Africa really is. Even Johannesburg moves at a crawl compared to megalopolises such as New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong and others.

You don't have to live here for long to realise that leisure hours are far more precious than they are in South Africa. London, for example, is on course to overtake New York as the financial capital of the world. The economy is booming, and with it, life becomes increasingly frenetic, as workers all scramble for their piece of the pie.

All this activity is changing the face of gaming in the First World. The PlayStation 3 was launched in the United Kingdom last month, but just the other day I walked past a whole stack of them sitting unclaimed in a shop window – a startling sight, considering the hype the console had been generating and Sony's alleged supply problems. People just seem to be less game-crazed than they have been in the past, at least in London. One cannot draw solid conclusions from a single high-street store, of course, but the general mood in the city is that people simply don't have the time to sit down and devote hours to a videogame.

Most of that time is spent traveling. While the roads are managed well, congestion charges and exorbitant petrol prices render automobile ownership an all-too-expensive pursuit. For the majority who take the tube to work every day, anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour and a half are lost on each journey. Along with this situation has come a noticeable rise in the number of people who own handheld consoles and game-capable mobile phones. It's a market shift from detailed, involved, plot-driven titles back towards arcade-style entertainment that lasts a few minutes here and there. Probably around half of all commuters with stable jobs own PlayStation

Portables or Nintendo DS's. The other half read newspapers.

Time is precious. And it's worth more than just money. People want to spend the time with their loved ones, relax with a cup of coffee before bed, get that extra hour of sleep. As such, the only time left for gaming is time spent travelling to work. Relatively archaic forms of entertainment, such as newspapers, magazines, novels and poetry, survive because of their portability. Film survives for a different reason: because it requires only a once-off payment of time in exchange for passive stimulation, which allows its audience to rest at the same time. The hardest-hit forms of entertainment in the midst of a bustling and growing city are television series with continuing storylines (as they require an ongoing commitment) and plot-driven videogames (for the same reason).

It's a little unfortunate, really. If arcade-action titles are driving the gaming economy – as they are, and are likely to continue doing – there is less and less room for the things that make interactive entertainment truly unique. Already we saw the decline and fall of the adventure game in the 1990s, and it looks as though the trend will continue.

Being a tube commuter myself, I understand all too well the allure of a quick gaming fix. Thus far, I'm one of the newspaper guys, but that PSP is looking more attractive every day. In the end, it's all down to the shifting tides of the economic cycle. At the moment we're in the middle of a long period of global growth, and for as long as it lasts, people in the biggest economies will be in a hurry. However, growth eventually levels out, and that's when we'll start to see the old school, plot-driven titles come to prominence again. And since there hasn't really been a global recession at all during the entire lifespan of the gaming industry so far, when we hit the period of decline that many economists say is inevitable, it's anybody's guess as to what types of games we'll be playing then. **NAG**





DAMMIT
by Megan Hughes

HOME GROWN, BUT WHERE?

IT IS AMAZING THAT some people still wonder why 'home grown' and 'proudly South African' markets just haven't taken off that well. Moreover, it is a sad situation because there are many reasons why it should do very well: we definitely have a nation full of extremely talented people, full of creative ideas and inspired notions. Our country really has so much to offer its people and tourists alike, especially when it comes to the live arts and theatre productions.

Nevertheless, you probably won't know much about that, having heard even less from others, would you? Hey, I don't blame you. It's not your fault that you haven't been informed, and it is likely that even if you tried to find out about what is happening in your part of this country, you would discover only a dead-end.

I'm a big fan of stand-up comedians and live theatre productions and so for the past few weeks I have been trying to find out what is showing here in sunny KwaZulu Natal. I had thought this would be a simple task, with so many South African sites popping up all over the Web. And I wasn't completely mistaken. It was easy to find several sites, through a quick Google search, specifically dedicated to advertising the latest shows in all areas around our tip of Africa. Some sites even boasted that they were "updated every week on a Thursday."

Honestly, I don't know if it is because of lack of funds, and thus staff shortages, mere laziness or plain forgetfulness, but almost all of these sites were advertising shows for 2005 and before. The few that were relatively up to date didn't represent all the playhouses and theatres our province has and thus had no information on some of the productions I was interested in. I didn't even bother trying to phone the telephone numbers listed on the sites, because I reckoned that if the information wasn't available on the Website, then it would be doubtful that the staff at enquiries would have the information at all. Moreover, while Computicket is happy to sell tickets for all current shows, it

offers no description of the productions themselves, which doesn't help much if you cannot find information on them elsewhere.

Surely, it cannot be that difficult to list the current showings on a Website. I've seen some of the software that can be used in the running of a decent Website and it hardly takes a few minutes to update the site's information. How can the playhouses and production theatres expect to sell tickets and fill their chairs when no one really has a clue what they're showing? All the hard work that the actors, actresses and stage production staff put into their productions is surely going to waste.

I was about to give up completely on my search, having traversed the South African tip of the Internet highway only to come up with a blank. It was then that someone, from the previous generation (presumably wiser due to age), pointed out to me that sometimes the old methods of finding information still work. What in the world was she talking about? The newspaper, apparently.

A Sunday edition of a local newspaper was then handed to me with the 'Lifestyle' section open. Lo and behold, it had a listing of all the current productions with descriptions and even a rating. I subsequently knew, after a brief scan of the paper, what I wanted to see and when it would be showing. Computicket had informed me of the price, so I knew that too.

It does strike me as a bit sad, or maybe pathetic, that with all the technology that has come about in recent years, which is supposed to speed up the process of communicating on both a municipal level and a global one, that something that came about in around the 1500s should be the most useful. In addition, if it's hard for a South African to find out about the current events in their own country, how can we possibly expect tourists to know?

I guess we could just send them a copy of the Sunday newspaper...





RAMJET
by Walt Pretorius

HARDCORE SQUAREPANTS

PEOPLE WHO CLAIM TO be hardcore gamers are just about the most pathetic wretches walking on God's green earth. First, there is nothing (I say again, nothing) hardcore about sitting around on your ass playing computer games. No, really, these guys are about as tough as sea sponges, only with less backbone.

Secondly, their lack of social skills is almost off the charts. Moreover, don't come with that "but competitive gaming is social" argument, because it holds about as much water as a toilet paper canteen. Going to a club, hanging out with friends, chucking a few steaks on the braai with beer in hand – that's social. Talking to girls. That's social. "Oh, I am a hardcore gamer, I play games with all my friends..." Yeah? Well, I get laid a lot – tons more fun than your computer-based circle-jerk, I assure you. I know you'll have to take my word for it, of course...

The worst thing about these ultra-hard sponges is the fact that they whine, though. Damn, can they whine! And it's always as part of a cycle, which runs more or less like this: game gets announced, gamer gets excited, gets caught up in the hype, game gets released, gamer is disappointed, downloads 5GB patch and then bitches about it. Every single time.

Now, maybe I expect too much from people – it's quite possible. I am working on three assumptions here that might be misleading me: (1) Hardcore gamers have been around the block in terms of gaming. They have been exposed to new game releases and the inevitable hype machine more than once. (2) Hardcore gamers have at least the intelligence level of a German shepherd. (3) Hardcore gamers (since they are so hard) have been weaned. They no longer need to be breast-fed, although they may still need help tying their shoelaces. So how is it then (if I am correct in my assumptions) that they still fall prey to this cycle. Let's analyse, point by point.

If they have been exposed to previous game releases, they should know what to expect. They should no longer be caught up in pre-release hype, because, in all honesty, it's marketing hype dreamt up

by people who are paid a lot of money to get creative with the facts. The first and second points sort of go together, because once a dog has been exposed to bad things a few times, it learns. If a dog can be conditioned, surely a human being can too. And the third: if they have been weaned, surely they are mature enough to realise that there are more important things in life. I love gaming, true, but I would rather express my concerns about skyrocketing crime rates than whine about Ultimate Crap for being, ultimately, crap.

I guess it's all about perspective, maybe with a bit of maturity thrown into the mix. Perhaps my life has led me down a different path than these brave and hardy invertebrates. Maybe I am too concerned about things like poverty and unemployment, when I should be worrying about headshot accuracy. One could even muse that it might be a case of me getting old, which is why I am more concerned about good schools than good graphics.

Actually, no, it's not that at all. It comes down to the plain and simple truth: I have developed a mature perspective, and I have realised that whether a game is good or bad (or whether I am good or bad at it) is irrelevant in the greater scheme of things. It doesn't matter at all. Sure, I prefer playing a good game, and I like being good at it, but realism and logic have taught me that being good at a good game is unlikely to put food on my table. We cannot all be Fatal1ty. The vast majority of us will never even come close. Which leads, by way of a little divertive waffling, right back to the matter of backbone. Is the reason for all this whining stemming from the fact that these guys cannot face reality? It seems like a harsh statement, but it is valid... Do these guys all think that they're the next world champion? Is their ultimate goal in life to make money from playing games? I think this is the case. I really, really do. Therefore, I have a message for the hardcore gamers out there: read a book; get a job; stand up straight; play games for fun and don't let them become so incredibly important to you. And tie your damned shoelaces. **NAG**



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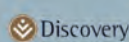
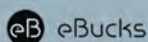
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LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER

ANNIVERSARY

REVISITING A LEGEND

Like a phoenix dragged from the ashes, Lara Croft arose once again as a favourite among gamers after her adventures in *Legend*, mainly thanks to Crystal Dynamics' timely and very focused intervention. However, the honeymoon is over and fans sat afterwards only longing for more. In fact, they all longed for the good old days when *Tomb Raider* was actually about raiding tombs. Well, that will finally turn into reality when Eidos releases *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*, a remake of Lara's first adventure ten years ago.

REDUX. A BEAUTIFUL WORD that simply means "brought back." You've probably heard it before, most recently with Francis Ford Coppola's revisiting of *Apocalypse Now*. In it, he introduced 49 minutes of new footage, a lot of it giving sides to characters. Suddenly the maniacal Lt. Kilgore seems a bit more human as he not only evacuates an injured child from the attack he led on the Vietnamese village with the great peak, but orders that the child's mother goes along. It's a small touch, but one of many that cascaded into a different experience. Then again, how fair is it to compare the two versions, which have more than twenty years separating them? If anything, the audiences in 2001 looked at *Apocalypse Now* quite differently than back in '79.

Did *Tomb Raider* face this problem? It's been ten years since the original game was released and you have to wonder just how many of today's gamers really remember it, let alone played it. Then again, *Tomb Raider* was an exceptional game. It's been echoed many times in many magazines, including this one, and there was always far more to *Tomb Raider* than Lara Croft and her sexy curves. In a way, it's quite annoying: many non-gamers simply decided that everyone liked *Tomb Raider* because they were in serious need of a night on the town and a good lay. They just never got it: the big deal about *Tomb Raider* is how often you clenched your butt.

If you've played it or Lara's spiritual

brother, *Prince of Persia*, you know all about it. There you are, having spent the past few minutes finding an insistent vertical path up an ancient ruin, dangling over a near void. Missing this jump meant you had to start from the bottom again – and the ledge on the other side just looked very far away. But there's no other obvious path forward, so you grit your teeth, check your angle and leap. For what feels much longer than it is, Lara is suspended in midair and her fingers, though reaching out, still haven't grabbed the edge. You tense up, holding your breath. Then she grabs, holds on, and you slump back into sloth comfort. Even if you've done the leap before, unless you know you have the timing and everything down pat, you go through that moment every time. It's usually ridiculous. If Lara wasn't meant to grab the ledge, you'll plummet down regardless. Nevertheless, somehow the achievement of climbing over crumbling ruins to dizzying heights with the elegance that befits any upper-cast lass just gets you every time. Then there is the crowning moment: solving the puzzle, shifting the rocks in place, flipping that switch, opening the heavy doors and bounding forward – straight into another set-piece with anxiety and a puzzle of its own.

This is probably why *Legend* didn't quite live up to some fans' expectations. However, the expectations were set pretty high. Crystal Dynamics was tasked with bringing

back a series that had suffered a downward spiral for years. Perhaps a victim of its own success, Core didn't seem to know what to do with the game. Perhaps no one did and it took all these years of failure to make the game's fundamentals relevant again. Either way, *Legend* needed to do something else first: get to grips with *Tomb Raider*. Lara is a demanding lady, after all. *Legend* was a valiant and successful attempt at courting her favour. Now Crystal Dynamics will see if it is developer-enough to handle her.

This will be *Anniversary*'s job. To help plug the hole between *Legend* and *Tomb Raider 8*, currently in development, Crystal Dynamics, along with Buzz Monkey, has set out to remake the original *Tomb Raider* game, but using the vision and engine that *Legend* initiated. In other words, no grid system. However, while *Legend* did far more globe-trotting and generated an interesting pace with its story, the first game was definitive because tomb raiding was what you did. *Anniversary* brings Lara's new-found freedom of movement and vast climbing areas back to the quest to find an Atlantean artefact called the 'Scion Key'. This also means a return to those tombs in Peru, Egypt and Greece, as well as the ancient city itself.

However, this isn't *Tomb Raider One*. This is a whole new game. Same restaurant, but new look and better food. While all the classics are revisited, right down to the Sphinx and the cog puzzle in Peru, this is definitely a new game. The development team has stressed that *Anniversary*, though faithful to the original, reinterprets and adds a lot. The new levels are colossal, while plenty of new puzzles will join old classics. The project also tries to avoid anachronisms: the chatty duo that bantered with Lara in *Legend* and the *Tomb Raider* movies isn't back. However, Lara's new and very useful magnetically-tipped rope is. So are the interactive cut-scenes and the ability to leap at angles and kick away at walls.

In fact, there are new moves, such as the ability to balance on the tips of poles and using the rope to hook onto a point and run along a wall to a nearby outcropping. These are obviously implemented in the level design – Lara won't suddenly be able to traverse a crypt as she pleases. However, it's that puzzle-solving nature of the *Tomb Raider* games that made the first few really alluring. Everyone feels it went wrong when things went from tombs to Venice, pointing out that without Venice "there'd be no Paris." But in reality, it was more the lack of imagination showed in urban areas that stunted those levels. *Legend* made a convincing case for more contemporary settings in some of its levels. The catch is that the levels should be challenging in their construction, something *Anniversary* appears to be lavishing in. During the demonstration, which revealed parts of the Peru and Egypt levels, many large set-pieces showed off some of the athletic demands the game will make from Lara and your nerves. The single parts of the levels are perhaps larger and definitely much more detailed than anything before in the series, and each of the four areas consists of multiple parts.

Sure, Eidos is really going for a cash-in here. There's no denying that a tenth anniversary game, after *Legend*'s success, would be stupid not to do. Nevertheless, fans will notice a lot of the original magic returning to the game, while newcomers appear to be in for a real treat. **NAG**



A MOMENT IN SPACE AND TIME

A part of the presentation at the Eidos event was a look at the *Tomb Raider* brand and how iconic Lara is. It covered magazine covers, sports drinks, Land Rovers, all the real-life Lara models and so on. But we're sure we've written at least something about that in the past. Yet, you cannot write about *Tomb Raider* and not gloat about how much the series has popularised games, so much so that we even have our own favourite pop culture reference to it.

In the 2001 comedy mini series *Spaced*, made by *Shaun of the Dead*'s Edgar Wright, Simon Pegg and Jessica Stevenson, there were plenty of game references, but one specifically stuck for us. No, it's not the one where Tim Bisley keeps drowning Lara because he's upset. In the comedy, Tim and Daisy, who share a flat, lied to the landlady Marsha by telling her they are a couple. During a scene at Marsha's flat, after Daisy broke up with her real boyfriend, Marsha thought she meant Tim.

"I can't say I'm surprised. I heard Tim shouting the other night at you." Marsha said. "I was shocked."

"Huh?" Daisy responded, confused. "You stupid cow... something about a key... You can't shoot straight, you big-titted bitch."

He was, of course, not fighting, but playing *Tomb Raider III*.



TOMB RAIDER 8

During the press event, Eidos boss man Ian Livingstone lyes, he of *Fighting Fantasy* said that *Tomb Raider 8* is in development and that Crystal Dynamics is hard at work on it right now. He also, with a hint of tender emotion, said that it was the most beautiful game he'd ever seen. On the one side, we're not sure if we should just believe him – it is, after all, a game Eidos wants everyone to think will be stunning. On the other hand, though, it's going to be exclusively on next-gen consoles, which means that whatever *Anniversary* will deliver should really pale in comparison. The big question is whether the curse of *Tomb Raider* will also strike CD and the eight title. The other big question is when the hell we can expect it! Only somewhere in 2008. Hopefully Eidos will like this article enough to give us – and you – a scoop on it soon.



LARA AND PERU: THE PERFECT GAMING DATE

IT WASN'T UNTIL a few days before this feature was written that *Tomb Raider* code unexpectedly arrived at the NAG office. Up to this point, the intention had been to run a feature just looking into *Anniversary*, seasoned with hopefully meaningful quotes from well-intending marketing people, as well as the few exclusive details we could figure out. Even the demonstration given of the game, featuring parts of the Peru and Egypt levels, only revealed a little and left us with little more than the impression of *Legend* with the original game's jacket. So thank goodness for publishers that trust us with their Beta code, because you need to spend a reasonable bit of hands-on time with *Anniversary* to really start to appreciate it.

The first level of the game suitably begins in the mountains of Peru. This time, though,

the quest doesn't start inside the cavern, but outside in the snow, as Lara has to navigate up a simple slope and to the top of the heavy doors, which serves as a brief 'catch up' of the controls. Once she presses the button, the doors open, wolves run out, the guide gets eaten and Lara continues on her own. Early on, she hits her first obstacle: a heavy door blocking the way. Instead of looking around, we spotted the first ledge and started to climb. Soon we found the first mechanism: a heavy block that we could pull down by hanging from it. Following the corridor around the area, we found the second block and pulled it down too. But it's a timed puzzle! The doors didn't open, so we made a few leaps and reached across to the first block, pulled it down, and then dropped back to the floor panel in the passage. The large doors




Lovely view. Nice jungle ,too





STUFF WE FOUND

After getting as far as we could in the game, we started messing around in the debug menu, looking for anything interesting. Playing with an option to 'Change Lara', pondering what it does, we discovered the models of doppelgänger Lara: the skinless alter ego you fight in the first game, as well as a solid gold Lara and outfits such as her wetsuit, cat suit and the *Legend* outfit. We also, at least, got to see the opening sequences for Greece and Egypt, which look good, and took a few satisfying shots with the shotgun. Eventually, after playing with the polygon options and trying to unlock all of the weapons, we found a level demonstration that loops through the game's various environments. Nothing to shoot and nowhere to climb up to (except for one bit involving pillars), it instead showcased how parts of the game could look. We're glad we found these, because it's all looking very good.



slid open, revealing more of the tomb we were in. Onwards to another challenge!

Even if you snorted at *Legend's* critics, writing them of as no-good, never-be-happy'ers, *Anniversary* makes you realise that while *Legend* was great, it lacked the essence that made the first game, well, legendary. Traversing tombs is, quite simply, excellent. Eventually, after many leaps, bounds and charging bears, we stumbled upon the classic 'gears' puzzle where you have to locate cogs and put them into a large gear mechanism, subsequently opening the way to the vault you are looking for. Not long into these we got to, yes, the Lost Valley, complete with raptors and that pesky Tyrannosaurus Rex. This introduction leaves even the original game cold. It doesn't matter if you've never played the first game or know it by heart, *Anniversary* appears to be packed full of surprises.

At times, you can see how a designer redesigned a classic portion of the game, then incorporated it into the new levels or designed the level around it. The retro *Indiana Jones*-like spirit of the first game is very strong. However, the grid-less control system brings a whole new dimension to the experience. It goes without saying that the ten years between then and now means that you can obviously expect significant differences in the motion and control, but even that doesn't dull the fluid beauty of it all. It almost feels like the first time we played *Sands of Time*, and *Anniversary* risks taking the distinction of being the best *Tomb Raider* yet, even though it's just a remake.

After toying with the debug menu, we managed to load the Saint Francis' Folly library level, also still in Peru. Here we encountered interesting constellation puzzles, pumas, the rival tomb raider and plenty of climbing and jumping. All of this, by the way, looked stunning and once again, *Tomb Raider* showed why the PS2 is not yet dead as a platform. That also has to do with Crystal now knowing how to develop a *Tomb Raider* game, plus a lot of familiarity with its own formula and the Legend engine. Until *Tomb Raider 8* arrives, *Anniversary* will also be the best-looking game in the series.

It was really disappointing to find the Greece and Egypt sections listed in the game but missing files, so we couldn't play them. All we can say, though, is the further you get into the game, the better it looks. Of Lara's new moves, we used two. The first involved perching on the edges of poles. Stay there too long and Lara loses her balance, but it doesn't take much to coordinate her and leap onto the next platform – which sometimes is another pole. We didn't see it, but surely expect tricky sections where you will balance from pole to pole. The second was done using Lara's rope, which can latch onto some sections in a level. Holding onto it, Lara could run along a wall to a nearby perch. We might have even used some of her other extra movements, but it all blends so seamlessly that you might not even spot them. Still, Lara moves across the levels with slick precision and whenever she cratered into the ground far below, she had no one but us to blame.

One of the pains of playing preview code is when you play something you really enjoy, you have to still wait a few months to at least get the proper fix. Once again, that's the case with *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*. Everyone is going to have to dig far and deep to find serious problems with it. **NAG**

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MOVE TO THE GROOVE

AFTER SOME TIME WITH the SIXAXIS controller for the PS3, jamming to *Flow* and *Blast Factor*, which both use the controller to great effect, we realised that quite a few existing games would really benefit from some tilt-sensing magic. Of course, there is no reason this couldn't be done with the Wiimote either, since the Wiimote and SIXAXIS are roughly the same thing,

except that the Wiimote understands its relative position to the screen, whereas the SIXAXIS only notices when you tilt the controller in a direction. Regardless, the tactile sensation of tilting a controller on purpose and not just because you're trying with all your might to make a corner in *Need for Speed* is pretty sweet.



HOUR OF VICTORY

Developer→ nFusion | **Publisher**→ Midway | **Platforms**→ 360
Genre→ Action | **Release Date**→ Q3 2007

Woo! Another World War II shooter! Well, if you don't like them, don't buy them. The problem is that there are still enough of us out there who will fork out some cash for a fantastic interpretation of the Second World War. That's especially the case after the success of the *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor* games on consoles. How can publishers resist? They can't and Midway is the latest to announce a WWII-themed shooter. Nevertheless, these shooters all need a hook. If you don't have the right angle, it's just *Doom* with Nazis. In the case of *Hour of Victory*, players will have the option to play as a 'covert operative' (fancy word for spy), see action as a British commando, or experience the long-distance sniping of a US Army Ranger. The question is whether players will be expected to play all three. Would action players be lured into stealth mode? This kind of genre mixing didn't create much appeal for the last *Commandos* game, but we'll have to wait for gameplay to appear before pondering on that further.



WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2008

Developer→ Juke's | **Publisher**→ THQ
Platforms→ DS, PS2, PS3, PSP, Wii, X360
Genre→ Sport | **Release Date**→ Q4 2007

Quite a few NAG staffers are, at the least, latent wrestling fans, but support ranges from catching PPVs and John Cena shirts to "Where's Kurt Angle?" conversations. Angle did drop off the roster suddenly, and the WWE dropped a few snide comments through its network of broadcasts, sites and magazines, showing that things didn't end nicely. Nevertheless, why are we thinking about Kurt? Because the last time a *SmackDown!* vs. *Raw* came to town, it featured him and the giant killer, Rey Mysterio, duking it out. It's almost time for the 2008 game, announced recently, and this time it features WWE careerists Kane, Undertaker and Triple-H, as well as the brand's latest superstar, Bobby Lashley. So we can only hope the real name might be *SmackDown!* vs. *Raw* vs. ECW, because then we'd really just spend all our time in any kind of hardcore match we could cobble up. It's too early to see if anything major is going to change, though.



THE HISTORY CHANNEL: GREAT BATTLES OF ROME

Developer→ Black Bean | **Publisher**→ Koch
Platforms→ PC, PSP, PS2
Genre→ Strategy | **Release Date**→ TBA

"Si vis pacem, para bellum - If you seek peace, prepare for war" - Publius Renatus, 390 AD. Nice quote, huh? It came with the press release. We also think the type of gamers who will play this game will like a quote like that. In addition, we're fluffing, because there's not that much out there about the game. From what NAG intelligence could gather, it's a strategy game with action underpinnings, plus a whole lot of extras courtesy of the History Channel. Taking the role of a legionnaire, players will take charge of Roman forces and lead assaults on Barbarian hordes and other states cruising for a bruising. In between these battles, or perhaps during them, History Channel media such as pictures and animations will inform the gamer of the real deal behind Roman warfare and the empire's historic battles. It sounds a bit like a Docu-game, which is really not a bad idea. The trick is getting it to play well.



WIPEOUT PULSE

Developer→ Studio Liverpool | **Publisher**→ SCEA
Platforms→ PSP | **Genre**→ Racing | **Release Date**→ September

Studio Liverpool, formerly Psygnosis, is back doing what it does best, or at least does most: *Wipeout*. Two years since the last title on the PSP, *Wipeout Pulse* will arrive to bring more high-speed future racing joy to queuing gamers everywhere. In the meantime, the studio has been developing the nice-looking *Formula One* for the PS3, so one hopes there are plans for a *Wipeout* on Sony's latest console. By September this year, PSP owners can play *Pulse*, which boasts a new soundtrack including the awesome Stanton Warriors. The game itself will feature 'mag strips', which the developer claims will allow "for a huge variety and dynamism in track design including loops, vertical

drops and 90-degree angled sections." It's bound to also be a graphical step up from *Pure*, which wasn't a bad looker in its day, either.

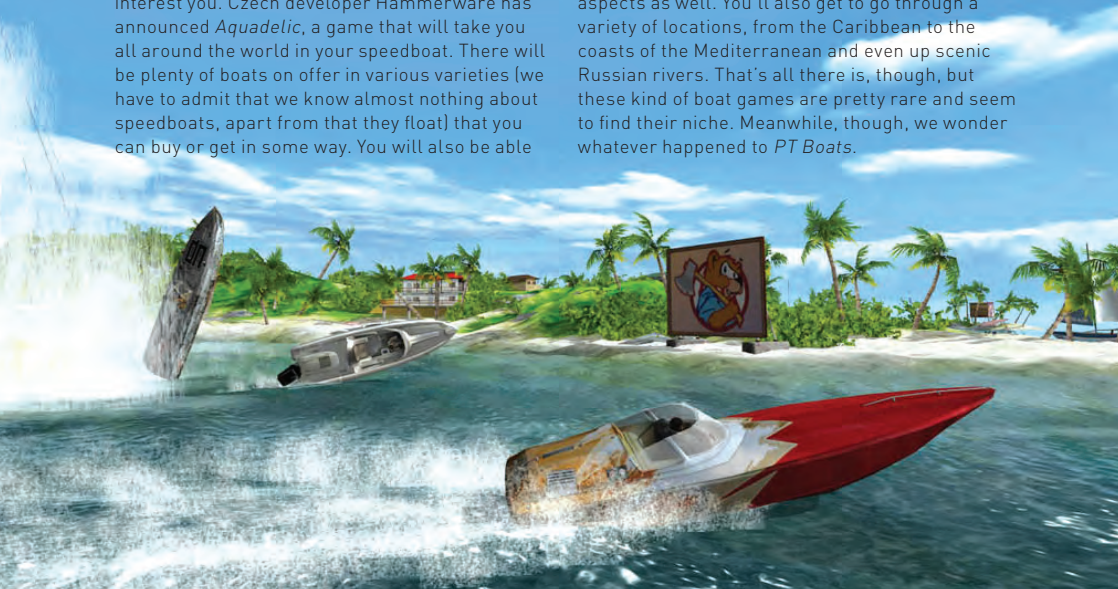


AQUADELIC

Developer→ Hammerware | **Publisher**→ 3D People
Platforms→ PC | **Genre**→ Racing | **Release Date**→ TBA

Do you fancy speedboats? Then this might interest you. Czech developer Hammerware has announced *Aquadelic*, a game that will take you all around the world in your speedboat. There will be plenty of boats on offer in various varieties (we have to admit that we know almost nothing about speedboats, apart from that they float) that you can buy or get in some way. You will also be able

to change the paint job and presumably other aspects as well. You'll also get to go through a variety of locations, from the Caribbean to the coasts of the Mediterranean and even up scenic Russian rivers. That's all there is, though, but these kind of boat games are pretty rare and seem to find their niche. Meanwhile, though, we wonder whatever happened to *PT Boats*.



GAMES THAT NEED SIXAXIS SUPPORT

BALLANCE

With its quirky ball-rolling puzzles that also included changing the material of the ball, which would impact velocity and weight, *Ballance* is still a NAG favourite for all its charm and uniqueness. If you could hook it up to a tilt sensor, it would make the fiddly balancing parts much easier and also improve the control overall, which would probably make the game a breeze. Oh *Ballance*, why didn't you get a sequel?

WIPEOUT

High-speed, futuristic, anti-gravity racing? That sounds like a perfect reason to have motion sensing in a controller. Smooth adjustments are much easier when you tilt a controller, since the analogue stick actually has resistance, but truthfully, without rumble, some of the experience will probably go amiss. We can just imagine barrelling down the track, angling and curving the controller in our hand as we take a long corner with precision. That's gaming, folks.

REZ

Synesthesia could probably be taken a step further with some tilt sensing, since *Rez* is all about synesthesia (look it up, it's interesting). We're not sure how exactly the tilt would work for *Rez*, since in the game you only need to move a reticle over enemies to lock onto them before releasing the fire button (think *Panzer Dragoon*). Nevertheless, since we've already committed to the idea, we're sure it could work somehow. It would need rumble though, because *Rez* without rumble is like a fish without tartar sauce.

FRISBEE

This is going to need a wrist strap, otherwise someone might get hurt. We can just imagine how awesome it would be to imitate throwing a Frisbee, controller in hand, and seeing it fly out in glorious next-gen graphics. Since *Fable 2* will have a dog, this would work well if you want to spend a little quality time with your pet (who also doubles as your health display, apparently). Ninja-games could mimic shuriken throwing this way. Just don't let your little brother play, or you might find a controller embedded in your chest.

JENGA/TOBLO

This, online and with multiplayer. How cool would an online multiplayer *Jenga/Toblo* match be, where you have to hold the controller steady as you hold down a button to slide the block in. You could avoid cheating by forcing the player to rotate the controller in a specific way before they can make their move, otherwise they'll just put the controller on a flat surface and not care. Sneaky bastards!



CAAAARS!

JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

YES, IT IS RATHER an odd title, isn't it?

Well, we sent our biomechanical recon arachnids scuttling out to solve the mystery, and discovered that *Hot Import Nights* is in fact the name of one of those travelling auto enthusiast 'lifestyle' shows. Turns out that THQ and HIN have come to some sort of bilaterally beneficial arrangement to showcase the custom car scene - so roll out those rides, DJs, and scantily-clad ladies, yo.

You start off your underground hotdoggin' career by creating a male or female avatar, then it's off to the races. While there's initially a sizeable pool of cars and customisation options available, you'll unlock more as you win challenges, move up the ranks, and bag yourself some boodle. All told, there are over 90 cars on offer, as well as over 600 licensed bits and bobs from 300 manufacturers to trick out your wagon, from lights and mirrors to rims, spoilers, and bumpers. You can even swap out your doors, seats and steering wheels, tint your windows, and personalise your licence plates. There're also loads of snazzy gloss, metallic and flake paint jobs to hum and haw over, as well as over 2,000 decals and vinyls to cover it all up.

There are two different race types - circuit and drift, featuring tracks in and around Tokyo, London, San Francisco, Paris, and more. Circuit races pit you against up to 10 opponents, with all eyes on that cash prize, and you'll need to make judicious use of your nitrous to powerslide your way to gloating victory. Failing

that, you can try and rattle your opponents by driving a little too close for comfort ("My beautiful paint job, you reckless goblin!"), raising their 'Spook Bars', and bullying those brazen peons out of your way. In drift mode, you'll be cruising solo on specially designed tracks, and given a score to beat. The big idea is to slip 'n' slide your way around the winding track, while maintaining long and frequent drifts will rack up muchos points, with score multipliers for avoiding wall collisions.

An innovative feature is the so-called "driver DNA" model. The game tracks your performance in the single-player mode, and creates a profile you can upload as a sort of ghosted version of yourself. Other users can download this and race against "you", with the information stored in this profile approximating your driving habits.

There's also a robust online multiplayer system, allowing up to 10 roadhogs to skim the asphalt at a time, while the gambling system that made the original game so sinful fun has made a return. You can lay down some greenbacks or even your precious pimped-out ride on the outcome of the race, but woe betide the cheater - once the pink slips have been laid down, the server removes the wagered car from your inventory and saves the game. Anyone 'accidentally' bailing out of a high-stakes race that's looking bleak can kiss their car goodbye. Don't play this one on dial-up. **NAG**

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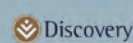
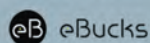
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Look & Listen
 For the Fans

TWO WORLDS

And you thought today's Tree-felling was tough

VARIOUS SITES ONLINE ARE a bit confused about *Two Worlds* and as such keep making stupid comments about it. One even went as far as saying that it might not be a triple-A game, but it looks awesome. Well, unless 'triple-A' means that it comes from one of the big publishers, then, yes, one could argue that this is a lesser title. But triple-A usually means it sells for full price and is expected to sell very well. *Two Worlds* is certainly looking too good to end up with any cut-down asking price. Why? Because it's *Oblivion* on steroids.

Two Worlds feels like a game someone designed while playing Bethesda's RPG, jotting down ideas on how to improve the genre. The developer, Reality Pump of the *Earth 2150* series fame, also looked at the *Gothic* games as well, which in my opinion is just perfect. The *Elder Scroll* games have been stagnating and even *Oblivion* still shows painful family resemblances to *Morrowind*, which the latter inherited from earlier *Elder Scrolls* games. *Gothic*... well, let's not forget the whole mess that was the third game. Basically the free-roaming fantasy RPG world needs an enema. *Two Worlds* stands ready

with a hose and pressure pump.

God is in the detail, so fans of the games mentioned so far will be happy to hear that loading times between doors won't exist, that the *Two Worlds* world will be persistent and that more advanced conversations will be on offer, going beyond the 'choose question, listen to response' approach *Oblivion* took. But the game's advancements go well beyond that. Budding alchemists will be happy to hear that you can pretty much use anything that you can fit into your cooking pot. So if you've always had the itch to know what kind of a potion a goat's leg, a zombie's toe and this weird mushroom you picked up somewhere would make, *Two Worlds* will deliver. Players can even concoct unique recipes that can be swapped and sold, even online. But more on that later.

In the game your character, as part of a party, stumbles upon the ancient tomb of a god, causing all kinds of political implications (it happened to be an Orich god of war), not to mention your sister went missing. Because of the story line, players will apparently be locked into choosing a human character (either sex), though other reports claim that more species

will be available to choose from, especially for the online component. So all of that is a bit vague. So are classes; whether *Two Worlds* will have classes remains to be seen, but the approach is more geared towards skills development anyway. In other words, you could likely start with a vanilla character and mold him or her through your actions. It sounds like *Oblivion* without all the confusing leveling elements, which would be a nice change. Apparently the developer also plans to exploit this to create better role-playing in the game.

On top of all that there is an entire multiplayer side to things. At the bottom is basic co-op, allowing friends and their characters to join up online. There are also murmurs of larger online environments, where you can, amongst other things, swap your alchemy recipes and have horse races. Beyond that *Two Worlds* appears to put a lot of work into fixing or honing elements of the genre, including how magic, sneaking and lugging around weapons work. You'll even have more options for transport than a horse, like big lizards, and one can only hope pack animals are also included. **NAG**

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB



Is it wrong that the nuns in this game look like strippers?





LAIR

Developer→ Factor 51 | Publisher→ SCEE | Genre→ Action/Adventure | Release→ TBA

SOME GAMES LOOK GOOD on paper. *Lair* looks damn good on paper (see page 56 in the April issue of *NAG*), but after some hands-on time with it, opinions seem to be changing. The idea of flying around on a dragon and causing all sorts of destruction in a stylised fantasy setting spruced up with next-generation visuals is an idea worth having. In terms of implementation, *Lair* missed a few guidelines that may have helped it along.

The biggest problem with *Lair* is the controls: you steer using the SIXAXIS tilt functionality and it's just plain awful. You get used to it after a while, but it remains uncomfortable and even slightly counter-intuitive. You need to be precise and steady when gliding, and that's easy enough. When you need to attack forces below you, the manoeuvring is either too responsive or not responsive enough. More often than not, sudden hand movements



related to pressing buttons send you twisting or turning into walls, the ocean, enemies, friendly units or another wall. There is a chance that this may just be a side effect of the Beta code itself and might be ironed out before retail release. Perhaps while they're at it they can fix the framerate, which seems to go from 30fps to 5fps for no good reason. **NAG**

Miktar "Minotaurus Rex" Dracon

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB

SHONEN JUMP'S
Yu-Gi-Oh!
TRADING CARD GAME

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Yu-Gi-Oh! National Championship takes place on May 26th
in Johannesburg. Venue to be confirmed

Free State – 22 April – Free State University, Bloemfontein
Eastern Cape – 29 April – The Contract Bridge Club, PE
Western Cape – 21 April – Stadium on main, CT
Durban – 14 April – Chatsworth Centre, Durban
Gauteng – 21 April – Toyzone Woodmead

The top 8 of each of these regional championships
qualify for the nationals

Tournaments start at 9am, entrance fee is R20



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KONAMI



Front mount suspension in action



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT

Developer→ Codemasters | Publisher→ Codemasters | Genre→ Racing | Release→ June 07

EVERYONE'S CLAMBERING ONTO THE next-gen bandwagon – or, in this case, the next-gen dirt-guzzlin' rallywagon, as Codemasters gets ready set go to roll out its latest *Colin McRae* title on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC.

Succeeding five previous-gen titles, *DiRT* uses the all-new proprietary Neon engine, built specifically for this iteration. And it's draped with every bell, whistle, gong, airhorn, and other obnoxious noisemaker imaginable.

First off, it's absolutely drop dead gorgeous. You'd be forgiven for thinking the screenshots are pre-rendered, it's just that eye-poppingly hot. Next up, Neon trots out marvelously sophisticated soft body physics for dynamic damage modelling that affects not just your car, but whatever bit of scenery you manage to assault with your reckless driving. Slam that metal barrier, and you're going to have a serious struggle separating your trashed buggy from the tangled remains – which, incidentally, will be left behind as a nice spiky surprise for anyone bringing up your rear. The crowds

of awe-struck onlookers, meanwhile, are fully-3D models that will shriek and run for cover should you careen wildly into their vicinity, while your car kicks up enormous clouds of dust, gravel and mud, and crushes the grass it skids over.

There's also a revamped replay system, featuring dynamic cameras that follow and dutifully capture every exhilarating moment, for you to smugly relive your past glories at your leisure.

Along with a basic Rally mode, and collision-happy Rally Cross and Crossover challenges, *DiRT* debuts Hill Climb and Rally Raid events, as well as the US-based Championship Off-Road Racing, including the entire run of the infamous Pike's Peak. This event will see up to 10 players battling it out in a range of supercharged off-roaders, including Super Buggies and Pro 4 Trucks, across dirt circuits jam-packed with thrilling tabletop jumps, drop-offs and moguls. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl



GT HD

Developer→ Polyphony | Publisher→ Sony | Genre→ Racing | Release→ 2007

REMEMBER THAT FEELING, THE one where you are speeding toward a corner, tapping the brake pedal in the braking zone and easing the car around a bend? Well, then go download the new *Gran Turismo HD* Concept. It might be the most fun the PlayStation 3 controller can offer. The demo gives you one track and eight cars: beat the track time with each car to unlock the rest of the cars. In doing this, you will see how much better the game looks than *GT4*. However, you'll also realise how much *GT HD* still looks like a PS2 game. Yes, it is stunning, but it doesn't quite look 'next-gen'. The demo will please *GT* fans, trust me: as with all *GT* games, it's a question of more of the

same – and a bit more – just the way we like it. The bit more that was added this time around is drifting. But it's not like *Need for Speed's* drifting, and neither is it like *Fast and Furious* drifting. This is *GT* drifting. Can you drift a real car? No? Well, *GT* will attempt to teach you. You can change tyres and traction control, so there is no blaming the car if you suck. There is an online ranking system so you can check your lap times and other player replays – great for when you are stuck, just check how the pros did it. Overall, it is *GT* and the new one at that. It plays like you'd expect from the series. And yes, the menu music still ROCKS!! **NAG**

Eddie Francis



CARS!

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB



PlayStation®2

under **R199** ⁹⁵ RRP



PC CD-ROM

under **R79** ⁹⁵ RRP



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HEIST

Developer → InXile Entertainment | Publisher → Codemasters | Genre → Simulation | Release → TBA

IT'S THE SUMMER OF '69 and you've just been released from prison. What do you do? Well, if you're Johnny Sutton, a man from a long line of serious thieves, not excluding your dad who lost his own life in a big job a few years ago, you find your old crew and get down to business.

Together with Uncle Sal and the reunited crew, you play as Johnny as he takes on the all-big banks of San Francisco in an attempt to become the most infamous bank robber

of that time. Each bank has its own security problems that you and the crew need to overcome, increasing in difficulty as Johnny moves up in the 'most wanted' list. Each successful robbery will earn the crew new tools that can be used, together with a bit of skill and planning, to pull off the next job. Of course, no bank robbery could be complete without a high-speed car chase with the police right on the bank robbers' tails, doing everything in their power, from ramming your

car to setting up barricades, to prevent your getaway.

However, according to Johnny, there is more to life than robbing banks, like robbing other places. Bars and restaurants are both fair pickings for the crew, each with their own risks and rewards, as are the armoured cars and strip clubs dotted all around the city. This is all, however, in the pursuit of the ultimate hold-up: the San Francisco Mint. **NAG**

Megan Hughes



PURSUIT FORCE: EXTREME JUSTICE

Developer → Polyphony | Publisher → Sony | Genre → Racing | Release → 2007

THE FIRST *PURSUIT FORCE* was an admirable PSP title that tried its darnedest to make you happy you had bought a PSP. Car hopping up traffic and solid gunplay resulted in genial fun despite everything else about it being rather tame. *Extreme Justice* raises the idea a notch by increasing the speed of the action and adding some new, larger vehicles for crime fighting. You'll be able to jump between tanks, trains and aeroplanes all in the name of executing *Extreme Justice* on those gang members threatening Capital City. New vehicle versatility includes jet skies, hovercraft and

bikes. The biggest change to the series is the new ground combat, letting you run around on foot as well as seamlessly switching to vehicle combat. Four-player Wi-Fi for PSP and split-screen two player for PS2 lets you involve friends, though the exact nature of the multiplayer is still up in the air. To make things easier, a new Justice Bar lets you regain health (which should ease the difficulty apparent in the first game). Some new characters have been added that provide fire support in ground, vehicle or air situations. **NAG**

Miktar "To The Max" Dracon



PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB

It also opens cans!

DARK SECTOR

Developer→ Digital Extremes | Publisher→ D3Publisher | Genre→ Action | Release→ Q4 2007

DARK SECTOR, A GAME for the PS3 and Xbox 360, comes from Digital Extremes, who are probably best known for their work on *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament* back in the days when they were partners with Epic. This already indicates what to expect: i.e. serious graphics with unlimited playability and lots of action.

Players will assume the role of Hayden, an ex-CIA agent with a dark past and no morals. The story starts with Hayden's new assignment for the black ops division. Hayden is attacked by a mutant virus that turns living creatures into metallic objects. After Hayden awakes from the attack, he finds himself covered in metal and with a whole range of new abilities, one of which is the ability to

produce glaives at will. Wonder what a glaive is? Go watch *Blade* this instant! Of course, this means that the very people Hayden thought were allies are now enemies because of his mutations, and this opens up the door to unparalleled mayhem and destruction that the player can inflict.

Graphics wise, this game is said to be rivalled only by the likes of *Gears of War*, but not much else is similar. In fact, the game's main inspiration is said to come from the *Zelda* series. According to the developer, once you play it you will see the similarities. This game is set to be released later this year and could very well be the next *Gears of War* or *Half-Life* we've been waiting for. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB



WARHOUND

Developer→ Techland | Publisher→ TBA | Genre→ Action | Release→ Q4 2007

THE NEW TITLE BY the developers of *Call of Juarez* is *Warhound*: a first-person shooter set in various locations around the world. The game even features locations in South Africa for a change. It is also a fresh concept in terms of gameplay: you are a mercenary who chooses his own destiny. Choose from many different missions, but be careful, because other mercenaries are also looking for work and will be competing against you. The missions include various specialties ranging from demolitions to sniping to saving hostages. The choice is yours.

One game similar to *Warhound* in terms of the contracting system is the all-time classic *Uplink*, which, for those of you who

have played *Uplink*, will add a new level of realism and fun to the gameplay. The amount of realism also extends as far as planning the mission to the finest detail. For example, you will even need to plan your extraction by hiring a helicopter to airlift you out or simply calling a cab, both having advantages and disadvantages. The game is also said to have online support in which up to 32 players can face off in one of many stages. *Warhound* will be released later on this year and by the looks of it, we will all be waiting on tenterhooks to see if it lives up to expectations. From what can be seen so far, this game looks to be legendary. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX


360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB



■ ■ The last day dawns on the Kingdom of Ascalon. It arrives with no fanfare, no tolling of alarms. Those who will remember will speak fondly of the warm morning breeze. People carry on with their daily lives, unaware that in a short while... everything they have ever known will come to an end. ■ ■



GUILD WARS

TAKING THE WORLD BY FIRESTORM

GUILD WARS EYE OF THE NORTH AND GUILD WARS 2 START THEIR QUEST TO DOMINATE THE MMO MARKET, NEITHER EXPECTING YOU TO PAY A MONTHLY FEE.



THE EXPANSION

GUILD WARS EYE OF THE NORTH

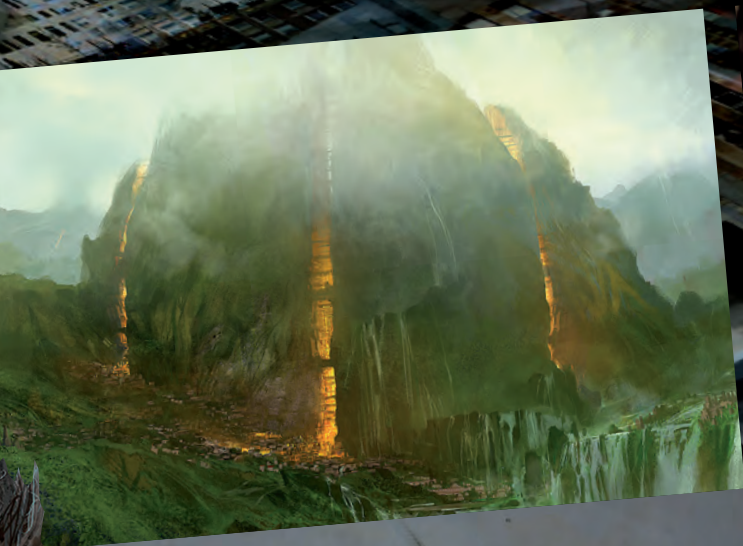
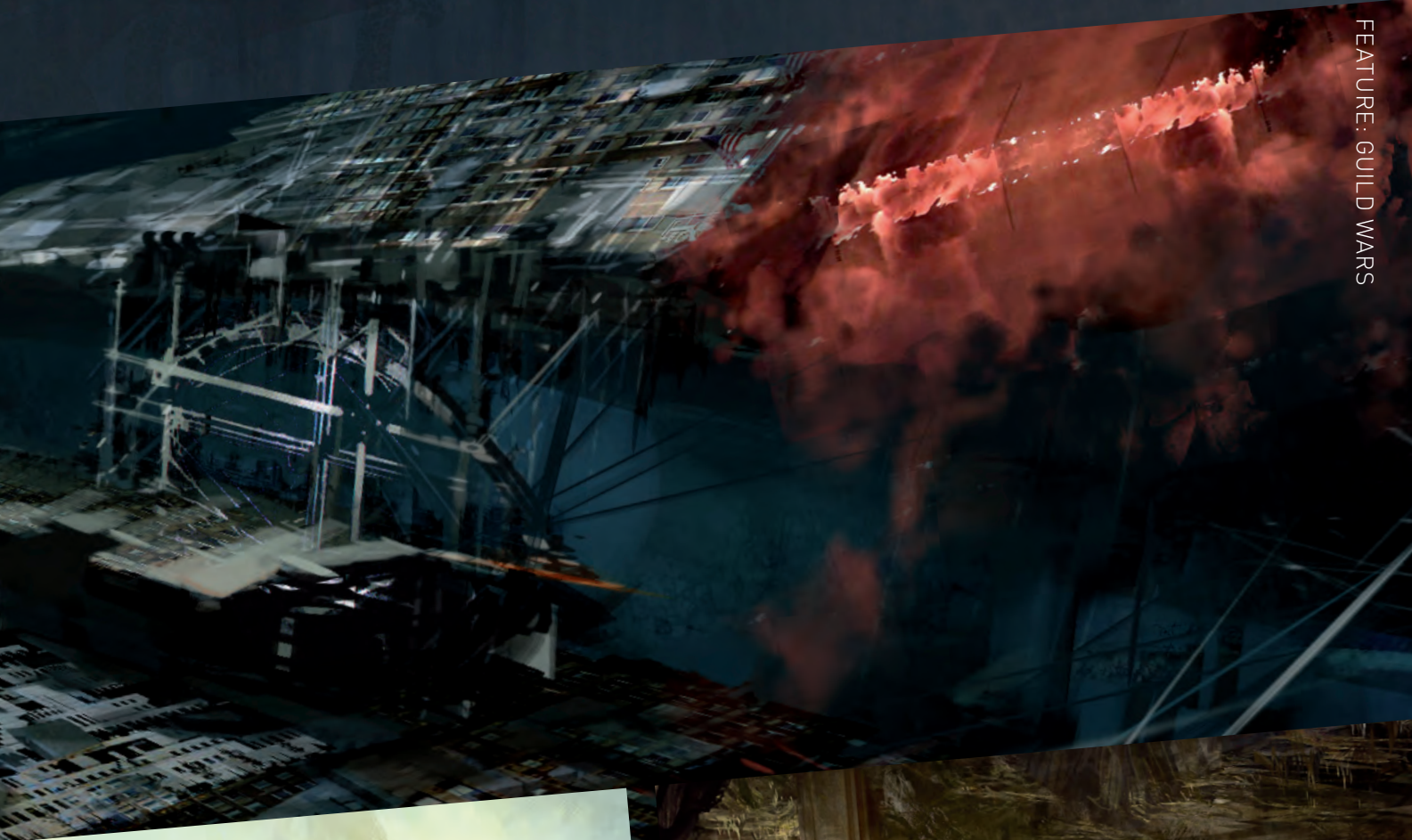
IN A DRAMATIC DEPARTURE from what we've come to expect from the previous chapters of *Guild Wars*, *Eye of the North* will be taking a different direction in terms of what it will be adding to the already vast and deep content found throughout the lands of Tyria. Unlike before, *Eye of the North* will be focusing primarily on content designed for fully levelled characters. Every creature, dungeon, spell and new item of armour has been designed specifically for max-level characters to give them the challenge they need to keep enjoying *Guild Wars*, since the only true enemy of an MMO is entropy.

The most surprising change in terms of the expansion is that it will be the first actual *Guild Wars* expansion, and will require at least one of the additional chapters, or the original *Prophecies* campaign.

ArenaNet decided to make *Eye of the North* an expansion instead of a standalone chapter because they felt the *Guild Wars* world is big enough. While the campaigns did a great job of adding to the world, introducing new professions and skills, as well as new continents and cultures to dive into, ArenaNet felt it was time to add more content for max-level players. They're also taking the opportunity to fill in details about the existing world, making nips and tucks here and there

to the story. Perhaps the main reason for the change in *Eye of the North* is that it will form the bridge between the story of the original *Guild Wars* and the story they are planning to tell in *Guild Wars 2*. A new campaign would have made this difficult, requiring an entirely new continent and story of its own.

Eye of the North introduces 18 massive, multi-level dungeons to the lands of the *Guild Wars Prophecies* campaign, which you can explore with any of the professions from any of the expansions. The interlocking nature of *Guild Wars* has - from the start - always allowed players to take their characters and items from any expansion to any of the others, mixing things up impressively, creating intense variety out of new situations. Adding even more variety, *Eye of the North* contains 150 new skills across all ten of the *Guild Wars* professions. Considering that you can only take eight skills into battle and you dual-class between two professions, it gives you 30 new skills you can utilise during combat. To keep things balanced between the Player vs. Environment and the Player vs. Player duality of *Guild Wars*, 50 of the new skills are Special Player vs. Environment-only skills. The most likely reason for this is because PvP and PvE are radically different environments and a skill suited for the missions in PvE may be too



Goatboy loves Raptors.
Goatboy is pleased

unbalanced for the PvP side of things.

There will be ten new Heroes for you to find via quests and then take with you on your journey through the realm. Like the Heroes introduced in *Nightfall*, these companions can be used in place of human party members and level up alongside you. You can adjust their skill sets, armour and weapon load-outs to suit your playing style or the mission ahead. Both you and your Heroes will benefit from 40 new armour sets introduced by *Eye of the North* - that's 40 sets for all ten *Guild Wars* professions. Along with the new armour, there will be new items, weapons and even titles that could be unlocked for your character or account, based on your actions or participation.

Eye of the North connects the world of *Guild Wars* with *Guild Wars 2* in several ways, the most noticeable of which is the introduction of the Asura and the Norn: two of the new playable races that will be found in *Guild Wars 2*. The Asura are being introduced in the most dramatic way, as a minipet for those who manage to get their hands on an unlock code (check out the Exclusive Asura Minipet box out!). Both the Asura and the Norn will be available as Heroes to enlist,

with each bringing their own unique strengths and weaknesses to your party. *Eye of the North* continues the story of the Humans and the Charr, and the Charr will also be a new playable race in *Guild Wars 2*, much to the delight of those who preferred their side of the story during the *Prophecies* campaign.

A great evil that threatens Tyria in *Guild Wars 2* will be introduced during the new dungeons and missions in *Eye of the North*, setting things up for the events that will follow hundreds of years later in the *Guild Wars 2* campaign as well as revealing what happened in Tyria after the end of *Prophecies*.

Perhaps the most interesting addition of them all is the Hall of Monuments, which will provide access to exclusive *Guild Wars* titles, companions, miniatures (minipets), armour and weapons that are not obtainable in *Guild Wars 2*, for players who own both *Eye of the North* and *Guild Wars 2*.


Since *Eye of the North* is an expansion and not an additional chapter like *Factions* or *Nightfall*, ArenaNet will be selling it at a cheaper price than that of the previous chapters. You can expect the new expansion later in 2007.

THE HISTORY

Guild Wars kicked off back in 2005 with its first chapter, which would later come to be known as *Prophecies*. The storyline throughout *Prophecies* weaves through the super continent of Tyria, which is also the name of the world. An ancient dragon muttered the Flameseeker Prophecy, which kicked things off and had players running about saving the world. In an interesting move, the tutorial aspect of the game is handled in a Pre-Searing (cataclysmic plot event) version of the city of Ascalon, still idyllic and lush. Once you choose to join the Academy, you head off to war against the beast-like Charr, ending the tutorial and moving into the proper storyline. Ascalon becomes a war torn husk and players venture forth into the continent following several main plot lines or picking off the side quests. *Prophecies* included six core professions: Elementalist, Mesmer, Monk, Necromancer, Ranger and Warrior.

Guild Wars Factions was released in 2006, exactly a year after *Prophecies*. Taking place on the southern continent of Cantha (based on Asia and separated from the continent of Tyria by the ocean), the events in *Factions* concern an evil assassin bodyguard called Shiro Tagachi who has returned from the dead. *Factions* introduced a global persistent war between rival nations as well as the addition of guild alliances. Also added are two new professions: the Assassin, capable of chain linking attacks to devastating effect; and the Ritualist, a turret-making spirit master.

Only six months later in 2006, *Guild Wars Nightfall* became available. Covering the continent of Elona, joined to Tyria by a vast desert, *Nightfall* introduced Heroes that level up with the player and can be customised in terms of armour, weapons and skill. Despite being AI controlled, Heroes can be micro-managed by players. The *Nightfall* professions increased the total of discreet and unique professions to ten: the Dervish wielding a scythe and enchantments as a holy warrior, while the Paragon is all about being a battle commander and support character capable of aiding allies with shouts and chants.



THE SEQUEL

GUILD WARS 2

TAKING PLACE IN TYRIA, specifically the kingdoms of Ascalon and Kryta, *Guild Wars 2* continues the events that began to unfold in *Eye of the North*, but hundreds of years after the events of the first three *Guild Wars* campaigns. The changes coming to the sequel to *Guild Wars* are immense. The game will now be a fully persistent world instead of instanced areas, and will also sport much-improved visuals due to an enhanced engine.

There will be multiple player races including Human, the warlike Charr, who featured predominantly in the *Prophecies* campaign, as well as the new Norn and Asura races. The Sylvari, also one of the new races to be introduced in *Eye of the North* during its storyline, appear to be slim humanoid females with leaf-like hair, soft facial features and swirling tattoos. They will apparently be magically adept and very agile, due to their strong connection to plants and nature.

ArenaNet is proud of *Guild Wars*, but felt it was time to start incorporating all the great ideas, quests and stories they've been thinking up, but couldn't add to the existing *Guild Wars* due to technical and design limitations. They believe that they can create a sequel that is even better than the already exemplary *Guild Wars*, and just couldn't wait to get started on it.

Alongside the traditional quests and story-based missions that people have come to know and love about *Guild Wars*, a third new type of content called 'events' is planned for *Guild Wars 2*. An event is a zone-wide happenstance or planned situation that will reward anyone who participates with experience, items or other things, much in the same way a quest or mission would. A single event might trigger several new events depending on how players react or do in it, creating an "ever-changing, living, breathing world," according to ArenaNet. Because groups will react to events as they happen, it naturally leans towards people experiencing game content as a group without the fuss of making sure that everyone is busy doing

the same quest. Far too often in *Guild Wars*, friends might go off questing by themselves before meeting up again, only to realise that now they need to go do the polarity of what their friend just did. The new event system means bands of brothers are more likely to enjoy the game together instead of apart. Playing 'catch up' shouldn't be such a hassle with the new system.

ArenaNet describes an example of a simple event chain that might suddenly occur in *Guild Wars 2*.

A dragon is seen flying over a valley and players can choose to try and drive the dragon away by firing at it with several pre-constructed ballistae. If the dragon is driven away, the local lord rewards the players who participated in driving the beast yonder. If the dragon is not driven away, it might in time swoop down to destroy an important bridge, which will then cause the woodworkers from the town to gather at the bridge to start repairs. Wagons loaded with materials will begin moving down the road from the town to the bridge to provide the woodworkers with the tools to repair the bridge. Because of this, bandits from several nearby camps might start attacking the wagons, letting players defend the wagons for a reward. Players might have to accompany the wagons all the way, making sure they reach their destination before receiving their reward. ArenaNet can add more to this setup, perhaps making the dragon return to attack the workers, or by having the bandits assist you against the dragon. The possibilities are endless.

Character progression hasn't been nailed down to specifics just yet, but *Guild Wars 2* will have the same extensive character advancement found in most persistent world MMOs. Taking inspiration from *City of Heroes*, they are also planning a sidekick system that lets lower level players party up with higher level ones, with a temporary boost to their abilities, or *vice versa*. Since the playable races are diverse, racial abilities will have a large impact on how a character plays. Each

Yeah, we also wonder how the jaw piece stays on

WHO'S WHO?

The key figures at ArenaNet include Jeff Strain, Mike O'Brien, James Phinney, Eric Flannum and Christopher Lye. Co-founder and programmer Jeff Strain leads the production and art teams of *Guild Wars*. Before founding ArenaNet, Jeff was the team lead and lead programmer of *World of Warcraft* as well as the senior programmer on both *Warcraft III* and *StarCraft*. During his four years at Blizzard, he was also a programmer on *Diablo*.

The other co-founder and programmer, Mike O'Brien, heads the design and content teams of *Guild Wars* and was previously a company director of Blizzard for over four years. Most recently, Mike was team lead and lead programmer of *Warcraft III* and personally developed its 3D engine. Mike was also the original creator and architect of Battle.net as the lead programmer on the project. On *StarCraft* and *Diablo*, he was senior programmer as well as the author of the network code for both games. Mike was actually featured as one of the 25 most influential people in the gaming industry in PC Gamer's September 1999 cover story, "Game Gods."

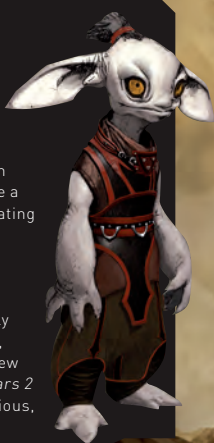
Game design team lead for *Guild Wars*, James Phinney, started as a programmer at Chaos Studios, which would later become Blizzard Entertainment. He worked on *Warcraft II* and *Diablo*, and then as lead designer and producer on *StarCraft*. James also wrote the story and dialogue for *Sacrifice* (by Shiny Entertainment), which is still regarded as one of the more unique RTS titles out there.

Starting as an artist and level designer at Blizzard Entertainment, Eric Flannum worked on *Warcraft II*, *Diablo* and *StarCraft*. Eric went on to work as lead designer on *Sacrifice* for Shiny Entertainment, as well as *The Bard's Tale* from inXile Entertainment.

As director of Marketing, Christopher Lye spearheads the global marketing for ArenaNet and *Guild Wars*. He previously worked as senior global product manager for RPGs and MMOs at Microsoft Game Studios, which includes work on *Ascheron's Call*, *Dungeon Siege* and *Jade Empire*, as well as the original Xbox proposal. As an avid fan of all things online, he spent his early years at Microsoft as the online promotions manager for Internet Explorer. He even met his wife through *Ascheron's Call*.

EXCLUSIVE ASURA MINIPET!

Next month, you'll find a code bundled with NAG that unlocks an exclusive Asura minipet in *Guild Wars*. The Asura are a subterranean race originating from the Depths of Tyria, but were forced into the Tarnished Coast by the encroaching forces of the Great Destroyer. Magically and technically proficient, the Asura will also be a new Playable Race in *Guild Wars 2* and are intelligent, ambitious, diminutive and arrogant.



A girl and her teddy bear are never far from each other

race has a primary ability that sets it apart from the others. As an example, the Norn have access to a skill that changes them into a half-Norn, half-bear form, giving them health and melee damage bonuses.

ArenaNet is still designing the professions for *Guild Wars 2*, but the ability to choose a primary and secondary profession in addition to your race has been confirmed. *Guild Wars 2* will still be playable by solo adventurers, although the Heroes and Henchmen are being changed to 'companions'. Every player in a group will be able to bring one companion, be it a pet or an additional fighter. Companions won't take up a party slot, and can be customised just like Heroes.

To make the combat more dynamic and active, players have direct control over their characters' movements, including jumping, increased interaction with the environment and more freedom of movement. As was mentioned earlier, *Eye of the North* will allow players to 'inherit' specific unlocks for their *Guild Wars 2* characters. The Hall of Monuments changes to reflect a player's achievements in *Eye of the North* and all three *Guild Wars* chapters, and every monument corresponds to a special unlock in *Guild Wars 2*. These include companions, pets, weapons, attire and miniatures. When you create a new *Guild Wars 2* character, you'll be able to choose one original *Guild Wars* character to 'inherit' your unlocks from.

Due to the new playable races, armour will no longer be profession-specific and

can be used by any profession or race, expanding the choices. This time around, there won't be separate characters for PvP and PvE. Instead, you'll be able to travel to an area called the Mists to help defend the world via PvP. Guild vs. Guild combat will now normalise all participants temporarily to max-level characters in terms of stats and access to items, to help level the playing field.

Since *Guild Wars 2* will be a large, persistent world, players who travel to the Mists will be able to battle players from other servers also running the entire world, very much like *Realm vs. Realm* combat found in most MMOs. ArenaNet mentions that the World vs. World combat will "be on a scale never before seen in a *Guild Wars* game," and the Mist area is actually a large, persistent area shared by multiple worlds. "It will play out like a giant strategy game," says ArenaNet, "with each world fighting to control more and more of the map." *Guild Wars 2* will actually use a global character database, letting players easily transfer between the worlds (realms).

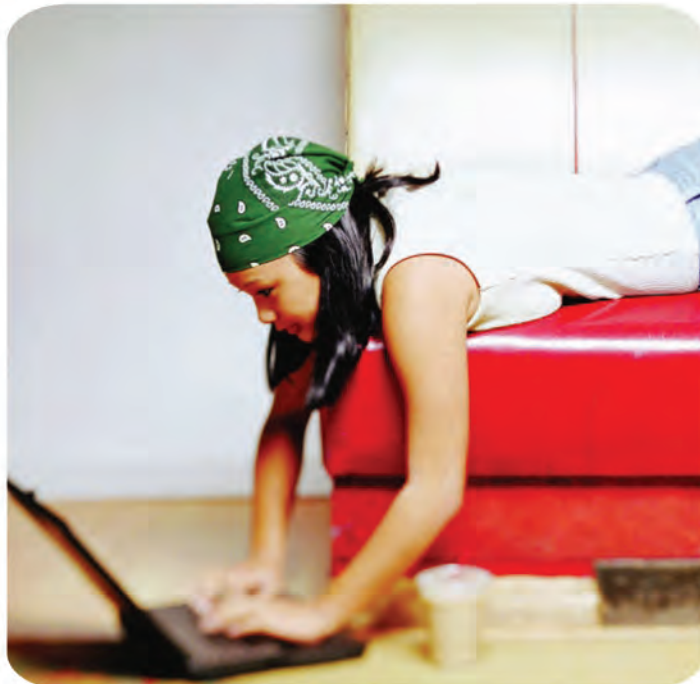
ArenaNet is happy to tell players that *Guild Wars 2* won't have a monthly subscription fee, just like its predecessor. "Our technology has advanced to the point [thanks to *Guild Wars*] where we can offer a massive, persistent online world like other MMOs out there, without having to charge a subscription fee." *Guild Wars 2* is expected to go into public Beta in 2008, and no release date has been set yet. **NAG**



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DREAM A LITTLE DREAM

...of massively amplified psionic damage, and an upwardly mobile eyeball mounted on leathery wings. Yes, the new Dream Mastery class is very dreamy indeed, and offers players some snappy new skills suitable for both ranged and melee types. Its primary attack (left button) skill imbues your weapons with psionic energy that does some ravaging vitality damage, and can be enhanced with additional burn damage further up the skill-tree. Even at low levels, you'll be flinging startled enemies way off screen. There are also three trance skills that, when active, create auras around your character (as well as buffing nearby allies) that reflect damage, boost healing rates, and cause enemy skill disruption and burn damage. The seer may also summon its phantasmic pet, the Nightmare, whose hypnotic gaze is able to dominate and confuse enemies while you gleefully chop them into bite-sized chunks.

I HAAAVE THE POWERRRR!

Along with all the shiny, pretty new weapons, armour, and baubles, there are two all-new item types: Artifacts and scrolls.

Artifacts come in three flavours – Lesser, Greater, and Divine – and they're crafted from fancy pants recipes called Arcane Formulae. You'll find these gathering mould in chests, or falling out of the pockets of the recently butchered. Lesser Artifacts usually call for one completed relic, one charm, and a scroll. Greater and Divine Artifacts are forged from – gasp! – other Artifacts. Meanwhile, your inventory is boasting a convenient new slot for this season's marvellous new must-have accessories. Once you've managed to cobble one together, you'll play gloating host to an always-on array of nifty affixes – from passive resistance, stat, and damage bonuses, right through to some devastating granted abilities.

Scrolls can be purchased from traders, and popped into a quick bar slot for some one-time, change-the-tide-of-battle action. They're hideously expensive, but are usually the only way to squash some of the game's nastier bosses. Their effects range from calling lightning bolts that'll zap enemies and keep them stunned for fifteen seconds, to creating a massive whirlpool o' destruction around your li'l warrior, to summoning a phalanx of undead minions that'll grind anything that looks even remotely threatening into steak tartare.

TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE

WHEN YOU RUN *IMMORTAL Throne* for the first time, it teases you with a brand-new title screen, then bumps back to Windows, and makes an enormous update to your existing *Titan Quest* installation. You might like to take this opportunity to hook up your intravenous caffeine supply apparatus.

Once this update is complete, the game relaunches and automatically begins the process of importing any existing characters from the vanilla campaign. And once this is done, you'll immediately notice something new! and improved! Your currently selected character is bathed in the angelic and dappled shades of bloom lighting. That's right: somewhat surprisingly, the expansion includes some subtle, but significant, graphical upgrades. There are environmental detail enhancements such as footprints, lapping ocean waves and rolling fog, some snazzy particle effects have been thrown in, and there's a triple-buffering option to smooth out those obstreperous framerate.

Interface additions and improvements include an auto-sort button in your inventory windows (at last!), an additional hot-keyed quick-slot bar, and an optional Lock Item Pickup to filter out and avoid gathering broken trash when you're supposed to be clubbing gorgons.

A most welcome gameplay addition is the Tombstone feature. When your feeble mortal husk cannot take any more bruising and crumples to the floor in a soggy heap, it'll obligingly transmogrify into a tombstone once you're whisked off back to the nearest Rebirth Fountain. You can trot back and seize this to reclaim some of your lost XP. Pet management has been revamped, and you can now harness all of your furry friends at the touch of a button, making it much easier

to heal or buff them. All pet actions can be hot-keyed, while you can now right-click their portraits to set your pets' behaviour.

There's a new auto-party feature that'll automatically add anyone joining your game to your intrepid band of heroes, while you can keep a beady eyeball on them via the Party Window to find their current locations, check out their inventories, and examine their character screens. The multiplayer lobby has been vastly improved, and a new PvP mode has been thrown into the fray for some backstabbing-your-former-comrades shenanigans.

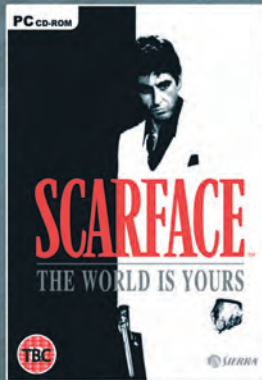
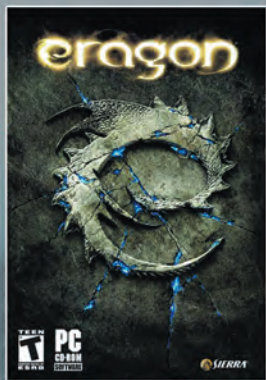
Eight enormous new areas have been added, from the vine-choked swamps and crumbling ruins surrounding Rhodes, through to the sun-drenched battlefields of Elysium and the "it's spiky because it's evil" battlements and dungeons of Hades's chthonian bolthole. The netherworld regions in particular are wholly unlike anything seen before in this game, with weird bulbous plant life and a sickly and thoroughly sinister River Styx (you so don't want to stick a sandal in there) that doesn't flow so much as ooze. It's gloomy and forbidding, and there's a visceral sense of brooding malevolence as you navigate your way through the siege lines sprawling the Plains of Judgement.

These landscapes are blistered with a glut of new varmint, including the skittering giant insectile Formicids, lumbering Troglodytes and golem-like Gigantes, and all manner of demonic fiends. There are also new boss monsters gambolling about (added retroactively throughout Acts I-IV, too), who present a significantly tougher challenge over regular beasts, but reward their virtuous executioners with oodles of XP and cool stuff. **NAG**



anygame anyplatform





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WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES [360]

The mean, green, pizza-eating machines are back, again, but this time sans the pizza. You don't need the pizza: the game is just that damn good. Okay, it's not brilliant, but everyone we get to play it keeps playing it. Cowabunga, dude!

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY [PS2]

We don't have the final game, but Eidos was kind enough to send us a Beta copy of the game. It's so close to done that we can hear Lara come charging down the hallway. Crystal Dynamics clearly didn't have the same worries and restrictions that guided the Lara-comeback that was heralded by *Legend*. *Anniversary* appears to be a lot better than *Legend* – and that says a lot.

BLAST FACTOR [PS3]

Let's be honest: *Blast Factor* is nothing more than a fancy *Mutant Storm* clone and exists purely as the PlayStation 3's answer to *Geometry Wars Evolved*. However, *GW* was a clone as well, and *Mutant Storm* also borrowed from earlier games. Not that any of this matters: *Blast Factor* is just oodles of fun, supports two players and does a nifty wave thing whenever you flick the controller left or right. It's a nice touch to the gameplay, except when one player accidentally sends all the bad bugs towards the player on the other side of the dish.

FLOW [PS3]

The SIXAXIS and its tilt control is and will always be regarded as a gimmick, not to mention Sony's rather paltry attempt to make up for not wanting to pay royalties for the DualShock's rumble feature. The company also claimed that having rumble and tilt in a controller at the same time isn't possible or too expensive. Up to this point, we didn't care. Drop the tilt for rumble! Nevertheless, Sony will need to make another plan because we still want rumble, but *flow* shows why the tilt feature can be great. It's a sweet game as well, nicely paced and just screaming for alternative substances.

BOOM BOOM ROCKET [XBLA]

The people who developed *Geometry Wars Evolved* joined forces with EA's casual gaming wing and came up with this little gem. It's really a casual rhythm game that took a bit of inspiration from PS2 launch title *Fantavision*, except there you tagged fireworks to explode them in sequences. Here you have to hit the right button at the right time during a song, else there are no fireworks. It's not that hard – initially. At the hardest, though, pretty much any rhythm game fan we enlisted to try failed dismally. We hope songs will be available for download soon.

084



087



096



096



093



WEB SCORES

BULLET WITCH

NAG	70
METACRITIC	55
GAMERANKINGS	N/A

DEF JAM: ICON

NAG	69
METACRITIC	69
GAMERANKINGS	N/A

GRAW 2

NAG	87
METACRITIC	86
GAMERANKINGS	N/A



090



094



089



095



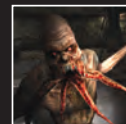
086

THE REVIEWERS

SPARTANS! TONIGHT, WE REVIEW IN HELL! WE ARE OUT OF PIZZA, AND OUT OF COKE! SOMEONE WILL HAVE TO GO TO THE SHOPS TO GET SNACKS! HELP, MY CAPS LOCK KEY IS STUCK!

Travis Hogg

This Spartan was killed before battle, because that's it man, game over man, game over!



Alex Jelagin

He's not a Spartan, he's a Cossack! But man, can that can man. Tannery tan.



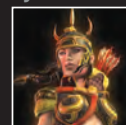
Toby Hudon

Shame the Spartan king couldn't read, because this Spartan could totally write.



Tarryn van der Byl

Big words! Pernicious sesquipedalian polysyllabic HELP MY DICTIONARY IS STUCK.



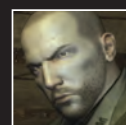
Eddie Francis

He told a joke involving a goat, two gay guys and three Persian Gods and now we're screwed.



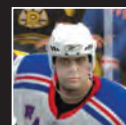
Justin Slabbert

Ever since the PS3 came out, this Spartan stopped being a rational human being.



Ryan Kalis

Persians don't wear shirts, so Ryan got killed by a sword to the groin before battle.



James Francis

A lone tollbooth on the long road of life, ladies and gentlespartans, James Francis.



Megan Hughes

It is a little known fact that Frank Miller was actually a hermaphrodite named Megan.



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.



NAG	92
METACRITIC	82
GAMERANKINGS	N/A

TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE



NAG	90
METACRITIC	79
GAMERANKINGS	N/A

RESIDENT EVIL 4



NAG	73
METACRITIC	73
GAMERANKINGS	N/A

ED'S NOTE: www.gamerankings.com was unavailable at the time the magazine went to press

mmmmmm ... SHINY!

A quick guide to the new NAG redesign

PC SPEC: Will this game rape your machine, or make it fly? Check the box at the bottom right for an explanation on our new fancy hardware rating system.

BETTER THAN/WORSE THAN: Everything is relative, right? Because of that, we keep making comparisons between games in this space, and try to be funny about it.

SCORE: You only care about this number, we know that. But try to pretend you read the reviews because they're so insightful and informative. Thank you, we love you.

VITAL INFO: A game can't survive without these vitals, so you should probably pay attention to them.



PLATFORMS: The brightest block is the platform on which the game was reviewed. Dimmer blocks are platforms on which the game also appears. Simple.

AWARDS: You won't find these NAG awards, given to games of merit, anywhere but in NAG. Truth.

GAME NAME: This is the important bit, and you might want to write it down somewhere just in case you need it later.

ICONS: Check the list on the right for our new frikkin' sweet icons, distilling the essence of games even further, just for you.

BOTTOM LINE: It all comes down to this, and the words written here will shape the future, moulding it towards gaming excellence.

DISTRIBUTOR LIST

For your convenience, the numbers of the distribution companies

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THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like, while giving us less work to do in the review. Everyone wins, so best memorise this list below and look out for them in the Review score box.

- ACTION:** When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.
- BABYSITTING:** Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.
- BITCHIN':** When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.
- BUGGY:** Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.
- CASH-IN/LICENSE:** Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.
- CINEMATIC:** Sweet-ass cutscenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.
- CLONE:** We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.
- COMPETITIVE:** You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.
- FOREIGN:** No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? Careful, it might be Foreign!
- ONLINE:** For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.
- PARTY:** Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.
- STUPID PEOPLE:** Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.
- ALL AGES:** These games contain no violence, immoral acts or anything that might narrow the demographic, but it may still be difficult.
- KID FRIENDLY:** Kids can play this game without needing an adult every five minutes to explain to them what button to press.
- 16+ RESTRICTION:** If you're 16 or over, you are well within your rights to play this game.
- 18+ RESTRICTION:** If you are not yet 18, please put down this game and back away slowly before the police come and arrest you.
- MULTIPLAYER:** The number on the controller icon indicates the maximum number of people who can play at the same time.

WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

- Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**
- Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**
- Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GB Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**
- Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**
- You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**

SATA Interface and Direct Disc Labeling for Quick and Personalized Data

ASUS DRW-1814 BLT Internal LightScribe DVD Rewriter Provides High-Speed Data Transfers

Once again, ASUS has spearheaded the technological advances of optical drives with the new DRW-1814 BLT internal DVD rewriter. This optical drive provides the user with high-speed 18XDVD+/-R and 8X DVD+/-R (DL) write speeds as well as 14X DVD-RAM read speed. With its SATA interface, users can enjoy quicker data transfer rates of up to five times the current DMA33 standard. This DVD drive also showcases some of ASUS's most innovative technologies.

Versatile Support between Media Formats

The ASUS DRW-1814 BLT allows users to read and write on both 18X DVD-write and DVD+Write formats. With such dual-format support, DVDs created by the DRW-1814 BLT can be read and played by most DVD-ROM drives and players. This DVD rewriter can also provide the user with 6X DVD- Rewrite, 8X DVD+ Rewrite, 48X CD- Write and 32X CD- Rewrite capabilities. On top of that, it can read at 16X DVD-ROM, 14X DVD-RAM and 48X CD-ROM speeds. Truly, this drive provides both flexible and high-speed capabilities.

Label Discs Creatively

An added advantage of this optical drive is the ASUS LightScribe technology. LightScribe allows the user to make personalized and professional looking discs by utilizing three distinct parts: the DRW-1814 BLT Drive, LightScribe-compatible discs and LightScribe-enabled burning software. All you have to do is to flip the disc over and re-insert the disc into the drive after burning to write graphics and text on the label side of the disc. It's that easy!

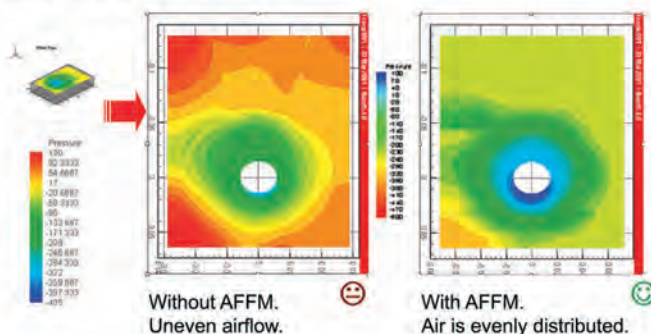
QuietTrack - Quiet and Stable

The innovative QuietTrack technology is developed to dampen drive noise in every conceivable fashion while improves on stability, and consists of two revolutionary features:



■ Airflow Field Modification (AFFM):

Noise and vibration are two major headaches users encounter when using a high-speed drive. AFFM is designed to change the uneven airflow field inside the drive to a balanced pressure distribution that leads to a quiet and stable operation.

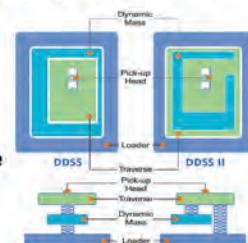


■ Double Dynamic Suspension System II (DDSSII):

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- Reduced Vibration Noise
- Enhanced Readability and Playability



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. IS THE BRAINCHILD of Ukrainian developer GSC Game World. Although its six-year development cycle was, compared to other games, smooth sailing pretty much all the way, critics of the game insisted that it was destined as vapourware. Yet, here it is. After an additional six months of polishing and sanding, gracefully allowed by publisher, THQ, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl* is about as good as it could possibly be.

Powered by the in-house developed and not very famous X-Ray engine, which also powered *Codename: Outbreak*, and utilising GSC's own ALife AI system, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* places you in the guise of a S.T.A.L.K.E.R. (an opportunistic and unofficial archaeologist and procurer of other valuables) in an alternative Chernobyl exclusion zone (named "the Zone"). You are found in the wreckage of a truck carrying a load of corpses, and are revived by a trader living near the Zone's border. As with most stories and games of this type, your character has amnesia, and a single, cryptic piece of evidence relating to his past.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. has all the trademark clunks of an Eastern European-developed FPS. The interface is minimalist in its presentation, and very few of the numbers and bars counting up and down make a great deal of sense to begin with. The gameplay is relentlessly unforgiving in spots, and you'll often find yourself quick-loading 11 or 12 times in a row to get past a certain section.

Your character's movement is focused on responsiveness and usability, somewhat removing his 'weight' and general sense of presence. It's a safe bet to say that most people's initial reaction to the game might be that it feels cheap.

Of course, any negative notions on the quality of the game will be nudged quite neatly to the back of your mind after an hour or two of playtime. Patented AI systems and HDR lighting aside, the Zone itself has been crafted and detailed in a way that puts it in a league of its own. Vegetation sways with the breeze; packs of mutant dogs snack on dead bodies. Ominous, tortured screams of pain and terror echo across the dead soil and the crumbling buildings. The deadening silence of the game world exuberates from every HDR-rendered, parallax-mapped inch of itself. Soldiers fight among each other, and teams of S.T.A.L.K.E.R.s fend off hordes of mutants. Everywhere you go the Zone seems to be living and breathing, and in an eerie way talking to you.

The single-player story leads you through various set-pieces in the Zone, and being based on the book *Roadside Picnic*, which won the 1977 John W. Campbell award for book of the year, it's not very difficult to believe that it manages to be both intriguing and rich in atmosphere. Along with hideous mutated humans and mysterious alien technology of unimaginable power,

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. features its fair share of sneaking down dark corridors and things jumping at your screen with high-pitched screams. It's fair to say that anyone who had trouble with *F.E.A.R.* or *Penumbra* might not be able to finish *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*

Unfortunately, in all its intricacy and complexity, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* is the kind of game in which colonies of bugs are able to nest in its littering of cracks and oversights. That's not to say the game is buggy - far from it. In the two weeks we've been playing it, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* only crashed once, and we have yet to come across anything seriously detrimental to our enjoyment of the game. However, the game is littered with them. From quests that stop working to *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*s that furtively stroll into campfires and burn to death, the bugs are mostly an aesthetic detriment. Realistically, none of anything wrong with *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* should even cross the mind of a more knowledgeable gamer, as they are understandably by-products of the game's big ideas. However, this, coupled with the flimsy-feeling movement and the somewhat rudimentary-feeling save system, might put off gamers for whom such things are integral to the experience. For anyone else, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* will probably bring tears to your eyes and raise the expectations of every game to come after it. **NAG**

Travis Hogg



IN MY OPINION...

TOBY HUDON:

Here we have an RPG with no stats, an FPS that can't decide if it's action, stealth, or tactical, a wacky power-up system, enemies who always drop their guns for you (but never their vastly superior armour), a hit cone that makes shooting anyone beyond 30 meters impossible with assault rifles, 'realistic' weapons that have no single/burst/full auto-select, an AI that can spot you at 100 meters in the dark through five bushes and a wall (and shoot you from there as well), and a sandbox game where 90% of the sandbox is full of lethal radiation. Good luck!

75
OUT OF 100

MIKTAR DRAGON:

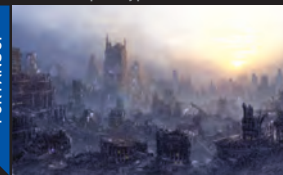
I have a personal system I use when it comes to rating games. It's a biased system, based on my own likes and dislikes. I have three foundations I look for in games: Genre, Theme, and Execution. In each of the three, I judge how well a game appeals to me on that merit. Let's take *System Shock 2* as an example. Its Genre was FPS/RPG, its Theme was Sci-Fi Horror and its Execution, to me, was impeccable. The Genre and Theme in *System Shock 2* had a good 'fit' for me, as I am a fan of both. The reason I explained all this is because *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* has a poor Genre and Theme fit (poor in Genre because I felt it didn't do a good job of being an FPS/RPG hybrid, and poor in Theme because I'm not a fan of the setting the game takes place in), as well as a mediocre Execution due to bugs, poor AI and a lack of general gameplay evolution. Make of that what you will.

68
OUT OF 100

Boiling Point



The Post Apocalypse



BETTER THAN

FOR FANS OF



BOTTOM LINE

Read all the opinions on these pages.

92
OUT OF 100





GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

THE FIRST GRAWSAW a simultaneous PC and 360 release. Although both games shared assets, setting and storyline, they were very different games. *GRAB 2* for the Xbox 360 is the sequel to the same system's previous game.

Based on an improved version of the Ghost Recon 2 engine, *GRAW 2* generally looks clean, polished, cohesive, and in places, quite beautiful. Mitchell and his squad once again take to the rolling canyons and sprawling cities of Mexico, as the storyline is similar to the first game's, with most of the characters having been carried over. Although the narrative is more or less the same, *GRAW 2* is noticeably denser with set-piece scenes and a somewhat more improbable series of events than its predecessor allowed. The game is a lot more liberal in its approach, which results in a far more cinematic campaign with a suitable orchestral music score, as well as a few very beautifully directed, even moving milestones.

GRAV 2's multiplayer features a substantial selection of game modes and maps, with the promise of downloadable content via Live. The familiar game modes have been spruced up a bit with features like armour and fire support (tanks and helicopters) and friendly AI soldiers. Red Storm decided not to duplicate *Rainbow Six: Vegas'* persistent multiplayer character, and therefore all the equipment and customisations are available to you from the start. Along with the familiar Capture and Hold, CTF, Team Survival and Assault multiplayer modes is a co-op mode that features support for up to 16 players, or up to four players in split-screen.

Although the multiplayer was clearly a focus, *GRAW 2*'s single-player is substantially lengthy and meaty. A good enough mix of missions, environment types, ordinance and equipment make the single-player campaign varied enough that we only really stopped playing to catch our breath after a particularly difficult or dramatic scene (usually at the end of an act). The typical Tom Clancy writing takes you through various incredible visions of military power, complete with mentions of WMD threats and Def Cons. In short, it's typically identifiable Tom Clancy. The improved multiplayer, new equipment, and noticeably better graphics all make *GRAW 2* a game that substantially improves upon its predecessor.

That being said, nothing really new is on offer for anyone who wasn't a fan of the first game. Fans of the *Rainbow Six* series might also be disappointed with the gameplay structure, as it focuses on a far more dynamic, manoeuvre-orientated game, which might feel sluggish or disconnected. Shooter fans may also be disheartened by the game's unforgiving damage system and slower, tactically mindful approach. Although still not quite as taxing as the original *Ghost Recon* for PC, *GRW 2*'s single-player campaign features more than enough 'seat-of-the-pants, bare-miss-by-an-inch' style gameplay. Tom Clancy fans have become addicted to.

It's difficult to describe *GRAW 2* in terms that don't ultimately decompose into "GRAW, but better," so that's what we're sticking with. Anyone who liked the first game will probably like the second, and as for everyone else, *GRAW 2* is a solid, capable, meaty and varied tactical shooter.

with a wide berth of gameplay, a lengthy and satisfying single-player campaign, substantial multiplayer and a healthy, if not slightly boring, collection of bonus content (mostly music videos and concept art). Newcomers might want to try the demo on Live or borrow a copy from a friend. **NAG**

Travis “Antioch” Hogg



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

I'VE JUST PULLED UP to my beachfront apartment after a heavy six-way automotive duel including a Weissman GT, a Ferrari F430 and a TVR Sagaris. Combined, this convoy would be worth around \$1.25 million, I guess... Now to me, this is what sim-racing can provide, which reality can't: risking serious damage to health and/or finances, massive potential for a lengthy detention in most countries, and the enmity of all your fellow road users. Not to mention access to some of the world's most gorgeous, exotic motoring marques ever to grace the PC screen.

Let's talk about some of the hardware on hand for a moment – alphabetically, for no other reason than to be fair: Ascari, Aston, Audi, Caterham, Chev, Ducati, Farbound, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Lotus, Mercedes, Nissan, Pagani, Weismann. Oh my! Oh, and that includes older legends like Ferrari 288 GTOs, Jag E-Types, Shelby GT500s, and even the tantalising Miura SV! Oh yes, and did you notice 'Ducati' in that list of manufacturers? Yep, there are super bikes too - although a more limited selection.

The island sounds like petrolhead heaven: some 200 kilometres large if you were to drive its coastline alone, populated with car dealers, specialised tuning shops, races to find and special missions to accomplish, property to invest in, scenic mountain passes to drive, and long, straight pieces of four-lane highway to plunder. Both the audio and the visuals in *TDU* are incredible. The cars are rendered faithfully and lit nicely, and the world itself is alive with detailed touches like birds and planes passing

overhead, ominous clouds looming and leaves and other debris whipped off the road before you by wind. If you fancy the most realistic interior camera position, you'll be rewarded with a skilful recreation of the real cabin architecture of whatever you happen to be blasting around in at the time.

If you're more of a sim-racer than an arcade driver, the physics model that dictates how the forces of the virtual world affect the car is crucial. Traditionally, driving games are built around their own custom physics modelling routines, but the *TDU* team has implemented Havok to get around writing their own and focusing more on getting the content perfect. It has worked: the feel and response as you drive the island are close to the real thing. The control mechanism is pretty horrible, but you can actually tune it a bit to get it working adequately. The Multiplayer didn't work too well at first, but persist and make sure you open all the port ranges listed in the 'readme' on your firewall, and things will come right. Remember that entire, free-roam island you have to burn rubber and earn money-doing missions on? Well, it's the same one that other racers online at the time are driving too...

It's by no means perfect, but it does work. Atari calls it MOOR (Massively Open Online Racing) and I played pretty much my entire game on an online profile: it's precisely like the single-player experience, just with the added benefit of other intelligence - not only the artificial kind.

Sure, *TDU* has a few bugs and is a machine killer: you'll need a pretty monstrous gaming

**This game is really about racing.
We promise**

rig to run it at its most beautiful. However, it does scale pretty well and more modest setups will still be amazed by things like the audio fidelity. Big up to Atari and development house Eden Games for this one. It's an absolute must-have driving game, end of story. **NAG**

Russell Bennett





RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

THE RESISTANCE HAS BEGUN and humankind must brace itself one more time for Sony's onslaught of exclusives, and one of the first waves comes in the form of *Resistance: Fall of Man*. This title promises to add new meaning to the once-stagnating pool of WWII titles, with a new and fresh take on the era where humanity unites against a threat greater than any other, the Chimerans.

With a completely new range of weapons and enemies comes fresh graphics and excellent level design, which takes full advantage of the vintage-meets-futuristic setting. Just sneaking down a war-torn street to get back to your squadron has its moments, with mines that leap out of the ground and unleash a flurry of spikes in all directions. Alien weapons are also extremely well thought-out with some very cool abilities, but nothing that is all too powerful. One such weapon even allows you to deploy a shield that can protect you against a flurry of Chimeran bullets, while another allows you to tag an enemy and all bullets fired from then on will fly directly to the unfortunate tagged one.

The storyline is one of epic proportions and follows a sergeant by the name of Nathan Hale,

who seems to be immune to the Chimeran virus, but does exhibit changes along the way. One such change comes in the form of health regeneration.

Other elements of this title include a rocking multiplayer cooperative mode for two people. It allows full access to the single-player missions and progresses the same. If co-op is not your thing, then you have eight other different game modes and plenty of different maps. It also supports up to 40 players via the PlayStation Network and comes with stats much like that of *Battlefield* titles. *Resistance: Fall of Man* also makes use of the new SIXAXIS functionality in both single and multiplayer modes. When an enemy grabs you, just shake the controller to shrug it off, or when someone tags you in multiplayer, a quick shake can be very effective to remove them. There are also drivable vehicles like jeeps and tanks, which can cause massive destruction if used properly. There are turrets that can be used throughout the game.

In the end, *Resistance: Fall of Man* is a worthy title that breaks all barriers and expectations of launch titles, promising to be one of the best PS3 games of the year.

NAG
Justin Slabbert



Any Medal of Honor title

AS GOOD AS

KINDA LIKE

Half-Life 2

18+

BOTTOM LINE

Fall of Man promises to be the start of the Rise of the PS3.

89
OUT OF 100



DEF JAM: ICON

PERHAPS, NOT UNSURPRISINGLY, *Def Jam* has come far for a series born from the uncanny union of professional wrestling and hip-hop. As its developer, Aki Corporation has managed to successfully evolve the series from an offhand idea into something tangible and unique. Why Electronic Arts felt that it should move its continued development away from the capable Aki Corporation, and instead give it to EA Chicago, we may never know. The only thing of merit EA Chicago has done is *Fight Night Round 2*, which wasn't bad but wasn't exceptional either.

Icon was a bit of a quandary to review, because my opinion of the game comes from both an academic perspective and from that of a casual fan of the series. It was enjoyable to watch *Def Jam* go from strength to strength as each new addition to the series added significant change, evolution and refinement. After a few hours with *Def Jam: Icon*, I'm of the opinion that the series is backsliding significantly in every conceivable way except the visuals.

It's hard to decide exactly where *Def Jam* lies in terms of its appeal. Do fans of the artists who appear in the game enjoy playing it? Do fans of wrestling/brawler style games enjoy the hip-hop theme? The real question may be whether either of these even matters, since the series has proven with successive sequels that there is indeed a market for whatever reason. What *Icon* may end up doing is showing which side of the market it now no longer appeals to.

The departure in *Icon* comes from a change in focus. Previously, the *Def Jam* games were heavily focused on the up close and personal combat mechanics as well as

the force and impact behind the damage you were dealing or had been dealt.

With *Icon*, the focus has been shifted to the music, bringing along a whole host of changes. Now, the environments you fight in are reactive to the beat of the song playing. The effect itself is stunning alongside the crisp visuals. At specific parts of a song, cars will explode, helicopters will swoop and other changes in the environment may happen that can affect the fight or turn the tables entirely. Combatants choose their favourite song before combat and can then (if given the chance) change the background soundtrack to their song, which gives them the advantage in combat. You can 'scratch' the song and 'viki-viki' the track to make the environment react when you want it to. That's cool, but it feels out of place and clumsy, which usually translates to 'gimmicky'. A gimmick gives a short burst of excitement but cannot sustain it, and *Icon* suffers from such gimmicks. By winning fights, you get cash to spend backing a song one of the artists of your record label produces by funnelling it into various marketing strategies. The result of this is more cash with which to buy clothes. Clothing doesn't influence the game in any way, making the whole 'business' aspect of the game completely unnecessary. Meanwhile, the combat has become less involved compared to *Fight for NY* and *The Takeover*. You can hit high fast and slow and low fast and slow. You can grab and throw in a direction and you can block or counter high or low. Most of the additions made to the combat system in *The Takeover* are missing from *Icon*. There is not even a

FOR FANS OF

Def Jam Vendetta

Def Jam: Fight for NY: The Takeover

WORSE THAN

18+

LOOK LISTEN

BOTTOM LINE

looked as if the Def Jam series was here to stay, but Icon may turn all that around.

69

OUT OF 100

tutorial to explain the game to newcomers, or the changes to returning fans. It feels as if too much attention has been placed on the music and not enough on the game. Online functionality (head-to-head combat) was not tested.

It seems that the game has suffered due to severe overproduction, a malady affecting quite a few respectable franchises such as the *Sonic* series. **NAG**

Miktar "BeatBox" Dracon



MOTORSTORM

MOTORSTORM IS ALL THAT you would expect to see from a launch title for the PS3. Although it has extremely good graphics and well thought-out gameplay, it lacks that special something which is difficult to pinpoint.

The game focuses on a festival in Monument Valley called MotorStorm and the goal is to win a series of off-road races. The game does include online play but lacks any split-screen mode for a single console. It has its moments, however, and these are definitely not lacking. Watching an ATV and a truck collide with each other and start blowing up, all while trying to drive through the mayhem is a definite blast. This is not to mention the fun that can be had by smashing up your own vehicle on a seemingly realistic terrain. Riding behind someone in the mud has realistic effects, because if you get too close, you get mud splatters that distort your view and could lead to more accidents. You do get turbo boosts, etc. and the game does make full use of the SIXAXIS' functionality. Twist the control in your hands to the left and you'll turn left; twist to the right and you turn to the right. Although this seems trivial, it is great fun, but does take some time to get used to.

There are seven different types of vehicles in the game ranging from dirt bikes all the way

through to massive rigs, each with their own pros and cons. For example, the dirt bike is fast, easy to ramp with and easy to manoeuvre, but is more likely to explode in a collision with other vehicles or terrain, whereas the truck is far more robust and much heavier. Another benefit of driving a truck is the ability to absolutely decimate any dirt bike or ATV that gets in your way. One key difference with all vehicles is the turbo boost, which comes in handy, but overuse could cause your vehicle to explode. This goes for both multiplayer and single-player modes. The AI balances the speed and agility of the dirt bikes and that of the trucks by creating advanced racing AI that causes havoc and mayhem all along the way. No two races are ever the same.

The game does, however, have an excellent sound track and includes such bands as Nirvana and Slipknot, amongst others. In the end, this game will bring much enjoyment to players, but not for long, because once the novelty of dirt racing and destruction wears off, there is not much left in terms of variety of levels. This game is good for a few laughs and good for a quick race now and again, but not one that screams addiction. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

AS GOOD AS

KINDA LIKE

BOTTOM LINE

Off-road meets crash test dummies in this hair-raising racing-sim.

85

OUT OF 100

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB



BULLET WITCH

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ Atari | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Action

THIS IS A GAME that divides people who play it into groups of 'Love' and 'Hate'. Personally, *Bullet Witch* scratched a particular itch that only Japanese games seem to be able to reach, but it isn't hard to imagine how that same scratching must come across as grating to those who don't have that itch. *Bullet Witch* is a straightforward third-person shooter that shies away from the training wheels these games tend to have on consoles, namely the lock-on aim adjust. The action is equally straightforward and requires you to [accurately] shoot all manner of creatures using your upgradeable (large) gun. Later you get a variety of powers, one of which lets you summon a tornado right into the middle of a forest for some rather spectacular results. *Bullet Witch* is all

'physics-upped' and casting a Meteor in the city will, beyond a doubt, squash you under the rubble of collapsing buildings. If the idea of fighting a giant inside-out skeleton fish while running along the wing of an airborne 747, dodging giant eyeballs that drill into the plane, doesn't appeal to you, it's obvious that you should walk past *Bullet Witch* and not make eye contact. The voice acting is as terrible as can be expected. It makes you wish they just kept the original Japanese and let you read subtitles - the game would actually be better for it, as the plot is actually surprisingly good and even catches you off guard with a nice twist. As far as games go, *Bullet Witch* is not a bad game despite what many online reviews may say about it (we suspect those reviewers didn't play



past the first level). It has solid, if difficult, gunplay along with a host of additional levels and costumes (teacher outfit!) you can purchase (for stupid cheap) off Xbox Live Marketplace. **NAG**

Miktar "Sammich" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE

Rent it or check out the demo because *Bullet Witch* either rubs you the wrong way or in the right places.

70
OUT OF 100

16+ [Icons: Gun, Bomb, Knife, Sword]



PIMP MY RIDE

RRP→ R299 | Publisher→ Activision | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Driving

THE THING THAT HURT me the most about this game is how much I looked forward to playing it. It sounded like fun, built around modding cars. You know, kinda like *Juiced* or *Need for Speed*. It would be on the Xbox 360, so it would look shiny. It's an MTV game, so at least it has some good music. Nevertheless, I was robbed of a few hours of my life I will never get back. MTV's *Pimp My Ride* is irritatingly dull. The basic idea is the same as the show: fix up an old, screwed-up car. Trick it out to the style of the owner. If he goes to the beach often, drop a shower on the back. If she's a model, slap in a mobile catwalk. How you go about doing this is a completely different matter. First, you get to drive around the city with a budget limit. As soon as you hit the budget,

the next part starts. There are two ways of getting money, depending on whether you like achievements. Either do challenges or just hit traffic. The challenges are a series of wanna-be rhythm games, except you don't follow the rhythm. I'm not too sure what you bash them to, but it is not the music. After all this you sit through a horrible video where you meet the client and Xzibit talks and talks. Now you get to mod the car. You have a set time in which you have to race from shop to shop to get the best sound, rims, paint and body. Don't expect any variety. If, at the end, the client prefers your car to the other shop's car, you win, and get to repeat the entire experience again. But hey, you get to keep the car. Unfortunately, some games still look ugly on a 360. You'd expect that *NFS* at

least set a standard as far as the driving goes. Don't ask. Sometimes you get to confuse the physics engine. Moreover, as a bonus, you can do it to a two-song, looping soundtrack. **NAG**

Eddie Francis

BOTTOM LINE

Not bad for wasting time, but rubbish nonetheless

48
OUT OF 100

[Icons: Dollar, Smiley, Gamepad, A]

TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE

RRP→ R299 | Publisher→ THQ | Distributor→ MiDigital | Genre→ RPG | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

YOU WERE ADVISED IN a previous issue to haul a gory offering to Zeus's altar for this expansion. Well, trot back out into your verdant pastures, ye faithful hoplites, and slaughter a herd of your finest and most endearing woolly lambs in the names of every Greek god you can remember from playing the original campaign. *Immortal Throne* is just so thoroughly awesome; it's totally worth sending your prized bleaters marching off to Charon's one-way riverboat cruise for. And funny we should mention that.

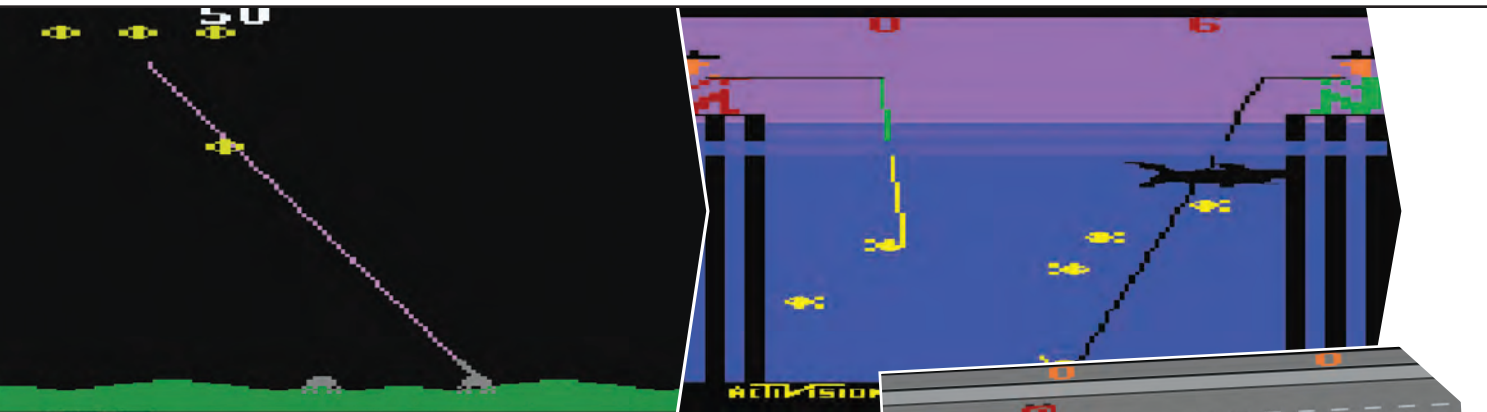
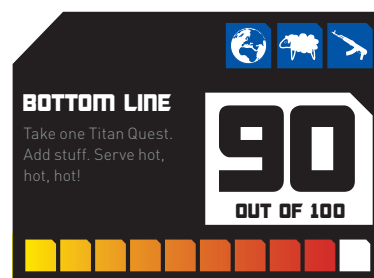
Mere seconds after you've reduced Typhon to a little purple bubble full of cool stuff, you're whisked off to Rhodes. Surprise, surprise, it's in ruins, there's still plenty of woe afoot, and everyone is looking to you with big Bambi eyes to set things right. As you scamper

about knocking the stuffing out of centaurs, harpies and cyclopes, it becomes increasingly apparent that something is awfully wrong in the land of the dead. Its dread lord has gotten a little ambitious and is mounting a gargantuan assault against the land of the living. Prompted by the relentlessly nagging ghost of the seer Tiresias, you'll dutifully bash teeth across the foetid Soronian swamps, and swagger on over the River Styx and down to the underworld to single-handedly subdue a disgruntled former ferryman, countless legions of troglodytes, demons, and infernal crabs, one very bad dog, and the big dead cheese himself, Hades, in his stylish subterranean lair. And you'll do it all in a skirt.

There's so much new stuff here that it necessitated a separate feature. However,

suffice to say, if you loved *Titan Quest*'s marvellously addictive killing and collecting gameplay, you're going to be all over this expansion like snakes on a gorgon. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl



ACTIVISION HITS REMIXED

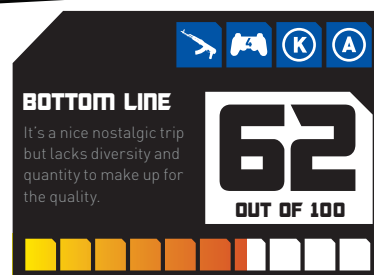
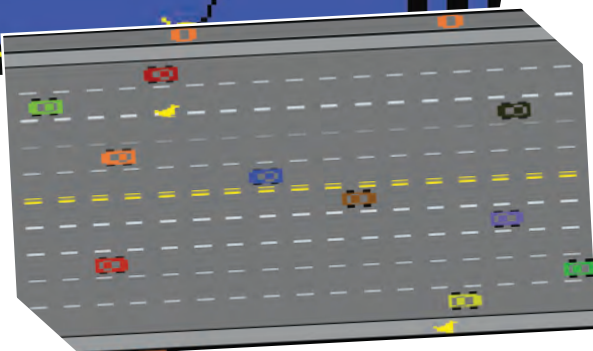
RRP→ R299 | Publisher→ Activision | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Compilation

REMEMBER THE ATARI 2600 console from years back? Remember those old pioneering videogames that looked terrible but played great? No? Well move along then, this isn't for you. If you do remember and want to relive those glory days, then Activision has the perfect product for you.

There's a nostalgic paradox at play when taking trips back in time thanks to modern technology. The memory of good times had in the past with videogames is a fragile thread – pluck it once too often and it's gone. You can remember being enthralled by these games when you were younger, but playing them now is a simplistic novelty that doesn't manage to entertain for very long. But back to the game. It features 44 Atari 2600 games including the classic *Pitfall*, its sequel, *River*

Raid and *Atlantis*. This collection would have been ace if every single game available on the old Atari system had been included, but unfortunately only Activision games are up for grabs here. A nice touch, however, is the inclusion of a few '80s music tracks featuring artists like Blondie, Berlin and Men Without Hats that play in the background while you play the games. Technically, the games work perfectly, and play and sound exactly as you remember them. It's fun for a while but has limited play longevity, and can, therefore, only be recommended to collectors as there's plenty of locked content available, including a few hilarious TV adverts for some of the games, as well as the manuals, cartridge and pack shots. **NAG**

Michael James





SAM & MAX: REALITY 2.0

RRP→ \$8.99 | Publisher→ Telltale Games | Distributor→ www.telltalegames.com | Genre→ Adventure | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

I THOUGHT I WAS PATIENT enough, but even I got annoyed after things kept being rehashed too often in this series. This resulted in a letter to Telltale, begging them for some of the changes I would like to see. Though the people at the developer told me that things are gearing up, I suppose many people sent in similar letters anyway, because the changes are clear. The fifth episode, *Reality 2.0*, is definitely one of the best in the series. *Abe Lincoln Must Die* already showed improvement, but this episode will restore your faith in the series. Max is still president, but since his policies largely involve giant robots, he has a lot of free time. Good thing too, because the commissioner called again. The evil mastermind this time? The Internet, enslaving people in an MMO called *Reality 2.0*.

The hypnosis thread appears again as our duo steps into virtual reality and solves the case.

Reality 2.0 features a lot of fresh jokes and dialogue, once again evoking you to click on everything just to see what the characters say. That's one of the prime reasons we play these games and it's good to see that Telltale realised it. The puzzles are still pretty simple and the short length lingers, plus it's worthless playing episode five unless you've played the rest of the series. However, it works very well, is very funny and sets up the final episode beautifully. Really, you should buy the entire season already. It's always available for a bargain on Telltale's site, plus a boxed copy of all six games is expected in August. The only things that really still hold this series



back are the memories of Adventure's golden age. Don't let sentiment get the better of you; you'll risk missing a fine series. **NAG**

James Francis

BOTTOM LINE
and fresh. Telltale has our faith again.

85
OUT OF 100

Progress bar: 100% (10 yellow squares, 1 red square)



THE SIMS LIFE STORIES

RRP→ R189 | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Distributor→ EA South Africa | Genre→ Simulation | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

IT SEEMS THAT THE expansion pack legacy that was both the *Sims* and the *Sims 2* has finally ended. This, fortunately for the *Sims* fans, doesn't mean the end of the *Sims* altogether. For the first time, Maxis and EA games are developing a range of standalone *Sims* games under the series title of *Life Stories*.

The newest feature that the *Sims Life Stories* offers is a chance to play out the *Life Stories* of two Sims, namely Riley and Vincent. Vincent's story starts out locked and you must play Riley's story to chapter four to unlock it.

Riley is new to the Four Corners neighbourhood, in which both *Life Stories* and *Free Play* mode take place, and is

staying with her aunt while Vincent is having women troubles, but, thankfully, no money problems. To continue both the story and move through the chapters, certain set goals need to be achieved. These can be anything from organising pancakes for breakfast to getting to know the neighbours.

Once one goal has been achieved, another will appear in its place. Occasionally there will be a time lapse between goals wherein you can help your Sim pass the time anyway you feel. If all the goals in a chapter have been achieved, then your Sim will receive a reward (anything from a special pool table to an espresso machine). These rewards then

become available in the buy mode in *Free Play* mode, which offers the classic style of play fans are familiar with. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

BOTTOM LINE
Yet another one for the *Sims* fans.

75
OUT OF 100

Progress bar: 100% (10 yellow squares, 1 red square)

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB



CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

RRP → 800 MS Points | Publisher → Microsoft | Distributor → Xbox Live Arcade | Genre → Action/Adventure

BY THE TIME DEVELOPER Koji Igarashi entered the scene, *Castlevania* had already stagnated into a by-the-numbers franchise. By making some smart design changes and refining the control scheme, Igarashi managed to propel the series to new heights and his first foray into *Castlevania*, *Symphony of the Night*, is still regarded as the crowning achievement of the series. Originally released on the PlayStation in 1997, the Xbox Live Arcade re-release is damn near perfect in every way, right down to the incredible soundtrack. The game actually opens with the final level from its predecessor (*Dracula X: Chi no Rondo*), which is about as unorthodox as it gets and serves to surprise the player as well as set up the chain of events that unfold in *Symphony of the Night*. Instead of being a linear slog through the levels, *Symphony* is actually an open-ended experience with RPG elements, such as improving stats and equipment you

can wield/wear. Some equipment sets have special abilities, such as the Shield Rod, which can trigger a different effect depending on which Shield you have equipped.

For once, you don't play a Belmont, and instead you control son-of-Dracula, Alucard. The control system is incredibly tight and intense. Alucard has knock-back physics, which make getting hit a difficult and technical situation. Get hit in the wrong place at the wrong time and you'll most likely get jostled to death between several enemies who give you no quarter. *Symphony of the Night* isn't difficult, but does require a modicum of patience to get to grips with the Street Fighter combination magic attacks and even more patience to unravel the exact sequence in which to explore the castle, as each new ability or form you gain (Wolf, Bat, Mist) grants you access to new areas of the castle. The whole game is an experience and ultimately very rewarding, especially once you realise

NAG >>>
MUST PLAY ★



that while the credits may be rolling you've actually not finished the game (hint: there are two castles, four if you play again as Richer).

Here is a tip if you're going to be rummaging around Dracula's castle: the goggles do nothing. However, the Holy Glasses, when used in the right place, show you much more than you'd expect to see. **NAG**

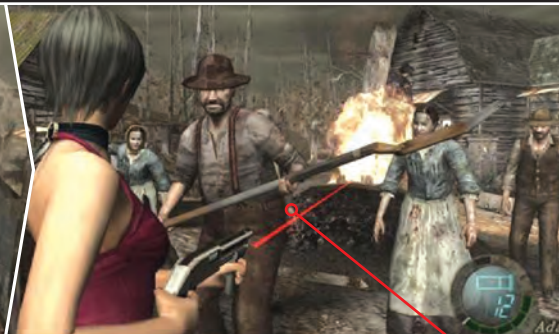
Miktar "Galamoth" Dracon



BOTTOM LINE

This game is a testament to solid design and incredible attention to detail.

92
OUT OF 100



The scythe vs. shotgun argument finally gets solved

RESIDENT EVIL 4

RRP → R199 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Action | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

RESIDENT EVIL 4 WAS a brilliant title when it first came out on the GameCube. It made a very successful jump to the PS2 and now, after two years of waiting, it has finally come to the PC. Although PC lovers will be excited about this game because of its predecessors, *Resident Evil 4* for the PC, by today's standards, is disappointing with inferior graphics and a lack of puzzle solving and mystery included in previous versions. Instead, this time round, the focus is based almost solely on action. It is impossible to strafe and the player cannot fire while running either. Instead, one must make do with standing still while shooting and turning to move.

The camera angles are weird to get used to and take a semi third-person perspective sitting above the shoulders. Although the graphics are not impressive, with this angle one shouldn't notice them unless specifically checking the textures out. Another irritating aspect is the need to go into an inventory menu

every time you want to swap weapons while you are facing some serious action and don't want to leave it for a second. Then again, this system does help when you want to buy new weapons, which can be purchased or even upgraded with EXP at any point during the game.

In keeping with the spirit of *Resident Evil*, players cannot go all gung-ho on enemies, but must rather take a more tactical route making use of the environment to bring down enemies, lest they run out of bullets. Although this keeps in spirit with the series, it does take a different turn from the usual when it comes to enemies and their AI. Instead of the usual zombies, players will now have to face humans who have been infected by parasites. This means that rather than being slow moving and stupid like their zombie counterparts, they are now fast and clever, being able to open doors and climb ladders or sneak up on you, as well as fire weapons.

Although much of what has been said here has been negative, it's only because it is a port where there has been almost no real advancement. It is just as good as its PS2 and GameCube counterparts are. In the end, it is a solid title for fans of *Resident Evil*, but if you already own a PS2, go for that version, as it is by nature a console game. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



BOTTOM LINE

A best-selling zombie shooter follow-up without the zombies.

73
OUT OF 100





NHL 2K7

Pucking hell!

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ 2K Sports | Distributor→ EA South Africa | Genre→ Sports

TO AVOID EMBARRASSING CLICHÉS, usage of the words 'puck', 'pucking' or 'puck sakes' will not be employed at any point in this review. On the other hand, this game is very, very 'ice'...

NHL 2K7 is the epitome of a jam-packed, realistic sports simulation. One of the major complaints about last year's offering concerned the substandard graphics. A year on, and 2K has fittingly made full use of the 360's capabilities. While little has changed gameplay-wise, it must be remembered that NHL 2K6 was a fairly robust title in itself. Naturally, then, playing it remains fantastically enjoyable and intuitive.

A new 'pressure' feature enables a player to single out opponents and then send teammates to rough them up. Like the fighting feature, which comes into

play when things go too far, it's a bit of a letdown. 'Checking' the hell out of some poor bloke when he least expects it is far more satisfying.

The game has a huge array of mini games and leagues, the primary one being the Franchise mode. Here the player takes control of an NHL team, managing injuries, player trades and, of course, on-ice action. Numerous achievements are available along the way including the daddy of them all, the Stanley Cup.

Final word must go to Cinemotion, a new innovation by 2K. Basically, it's a musical score for gameplay. Slow, steady music accompanies lulls in the game and builds up into a booming crescendo upon scoring. It's definitely cheesy, but something about it is great fun too. **NAG**

Ryan Kalis



Canadian golf is wierd

Icons: Cake, Globe, Arrow, Gamepad, 16+

BOTTOM LINE

A flowing, intense, feature-strewn ice hockey title.

80
OUT OF 100

Progress bar: 10 yellow squares, 10 red squares, 10 white squares

Finished slaughtering the Locust Horde?

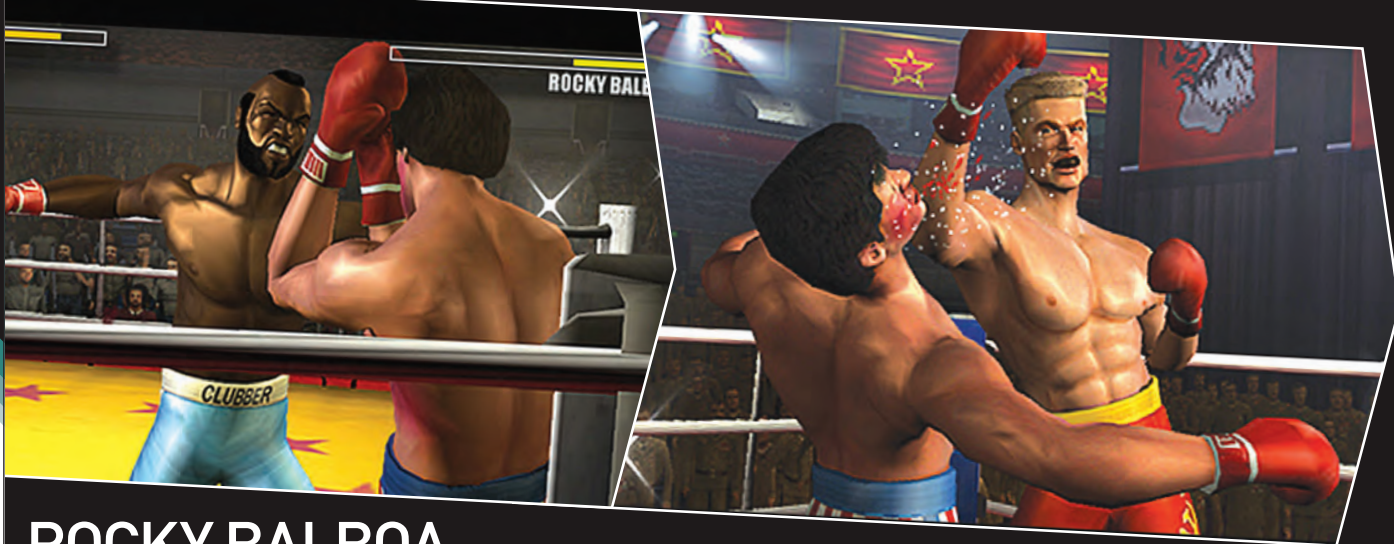
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ROCKY BALBOA

RRP→ R449 | Publisher→ Ubisoft | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Sport

DUN! CHUGGACHUGGACHUGGA. DUN, DUN, DUN! Chuggachuggachugga. Dun, dun, DUN! Chuggachuggachugga. DUN! Dun! DUUUUUUN!

It's the game of the movie(s). It's a bunch of Rocky's fights, Rising up to the challenge of almost certain doom because it's a licensed title. And everybody knows licensed titles suck.

Not so much an exclusive tie-in to the most recent film, this game is a sort of homage to the entire series. Nevertheless, somewhat bizarrely there's no story or career mode. Instead, there's a Historical mode, where – playing as the Italian Stallion himself – you get to hop 'n' slap your ruggedly butch way through every bout featured in the films, trouncing each

opponent in chronological order before the next is unlocked. Then there's an Exhibition mode, where you can choose your fighter, your trembling opponent, and an arena, for some mindless violence. Lastly, there's the Fast Lane mode, trotting out a multitude of time-limited challenges, with prescribed conditions for victory – konk out your opponent, don't fall over, look thoroughly vacant... that sort of thing.

The graphics are rather pretty for a PSP title, with especially robust character models and some sexy sweaty sheens. Landing a really wicked uppercut will also leave a lovely purple welt, as commemorative testament to your unsophisticated awesomeness. The gameplay itself is authentically brutal, stylish and satisfying, but a tad on the difficult side

(with a fairly extensive and complex set of moves to master), and sometimes a little too unforgiving. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

BOTTOM LINE

Eat lightning, crap thunder. And hit people from Rockies I-VI.



"Tonight, we dine in Heck!"

300: MARCH TO GLORY

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ Eidos Interactive | Distributor→ WWE | Genre→ Action

THIS GAME SHOULD REALLY not have been a PSP exclusive, because the only thing *300* lacks is more polygon-pushing horsepower. The game itself is a solid action experience that takes a lot of inspiration from the visceral movie and the original graphic novel. Sony probably wanted a good reason for people to buy a PSP, and while *300* is a decent enough PSP game, it really isn't that good to merit getting a PSP. Existing owners will be happy with *300* (provided they liked the movie or graphic novel) as it manages to hold itself together well. The combat is a light/heavy attack affair where attacks can be strung into combos. The more you

fight, the more points you get with which to buy new and upgraded weapons or new combination moves. Lambdas dotted around the levels unlock Film Stills, Cinematics and Storyboards/Concept Art. The action is kept fresh by scene changes that also change the nature of the game: single melee combat turns into phalanx vs. elephant where you control the entire phalanx as you move forward down a linear path, pushing and attacking enemies as a unit. When the sky darkens, that's your cue to 'tuck tail' and protect yourself from an impressive rain of arrows. Thankfully, enemies don't defend themselves and the arrows turn from a

curse to a blessing. It's a good game, but not worthy of Sparta. **NAG**

Miktar "Athenian Boy Lover" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE

PSP owners who liked the movie should enjoy it, but everyone else will think it's bland and uninspired.



SHINOBIDO: TALES OF THE NINJA

RRP→ R469 | Publisher→ SCEE | Distributor→ Ster Kinekor | Genre→ Action

IT'S COOL TO BE totally ninja. Instant kills, stealing stuff and running so fast you can lean forward far beyond believable physics are awesome. On the heels of the PS2 version, *Tales of the Ninja* takes the free-form ninja gameplay from *Shinobido: Way of the Ninja* and condenses it for the portable format, perhaps to the detriment of the formula. Instead of an involved system of interlocking factions in a quasi-sandbox world, the PSP version opts for a more linear mission approach that branches at specific points. Inside a mission, leaping between buildings and taking out hapless enemies with your patented ninja-stealth action work, despite the best efforts of the camera. It's fun to

be sneaky in the game, but sometimes you're spotted by a bad guy (death, more often than not) when you really shouldn't have been and you're forced to fight with an unruly camera, enemies that go through walls and other mishaps. The stealthy instant-kill system works and is generally satisfying, but beyond that, everything else feels rushed or poorly implemented. As you complete missions, you unlock more fighters with skills and moves that can be enhanced. Four player wireless (ad hoc) battles add some value and you can download additional maps. **NAG**

Miktar "I R NINJA" Dracon



BOTTOM LINE

Not an essential purchase due to the fiddly bits, but it might sneak into the hearts of gamers who like the theme.

69
OUT OF 100



BLAST FACTOR

RRP→ R45 | Publisher→ SCEE
Distributor→ PlayStation Network
Platforms→ PS3 | Genre→ Arcade

MAN, THESE REVIEWS ARE short. In *Blast Factor*, you pilot a nano-machine in a Petri dish blasting viruses - very much like *Geometry Wars*, but with a few twists. Tilting the SIXAXIS controller left or right sloshes the liquid to a side, letting you bunch up enemies for 'Massive Damage'. The enemies are quite diverse and keep you on your toes. If you play well, you are put in the Hard levels, but if you suck, the game drops you to the Easy levels. The Petri dish feels a bit cramped and most enemies look more like particle effects than anything, but some actually sink into the liquid to hide from you - the little bastards. It's cheap fun at R45 from the PlayStation Network, and a four-player, cooperative mode will be patched in soon, according to Sony. **NAG**

Miktar "Germinating" Dracon

75
OUT OF 100

PEGGLE

RRP→ \$19.95 | Publisher→ PopCap Games
Distributor→ Steam | Platforms→ PC
Genre→ Action Puzzle

JUST LIKE EVERY POPCAP game before it, *Peggle* is pure fun distilled into concentrating addictiveness. Digitally distributed on Steam, the general premise is a simple combination of Pachinko (a popular pinball-like gambling machine widespread in Japan) and *Bricks*. You aim a ball from the top of the screen and try to hit pegs (which are removed when hit) on the way down. Remove all the orange ones and you win. *Peggle* kicks into high gear once you use the powers of the Masters such as a Fireball, which goes right through pegs, or a Spookyball, which pops out the bottom and appears at the top again. A personal favourite is the Zen Ball, which adjusts your shot slightly to stop it from sucking. You can save and share excellent replays and there are more than enough levels to keep you busy for a while. *Peggle* maintains the PopCap reputation of quality, polished and affordable casual gaming. **NAG**

Miktar "Ballsy" Dracon

82
OUT OF 100



WORMS HD

RRP→ 400 MS Points | Publisher→ Microsoft
Distributor→ Xbox Live Arcade
Platforms→ 360 | Genre→ Action

COWBOY WHISTLE! THE BAD seems to be AI inflicted with dumb, fiddly controls that make aiming difficult and a lack of more weapon variety. The Sheep Bomb and Banana Bomb are about as extravagant as the weapons get. The Good includes online and offline multiplayer for up to four people (even with only one controller, pass it on). You can only have one local player when playing online, which is really stupid. Why they didn't include the ability to have any combination of online/offline players, we'll never know. Thankfully, the Annelid portion of *Worms HD* is intact, and the rocket launcher induced hilarity remains as fresh and fun as it has always been. **NAG**

Miktar "Wriggles" Dracon

70
OUT OF 100

THIS JUST IN AT THE NAG OFFICE

**TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (360)**

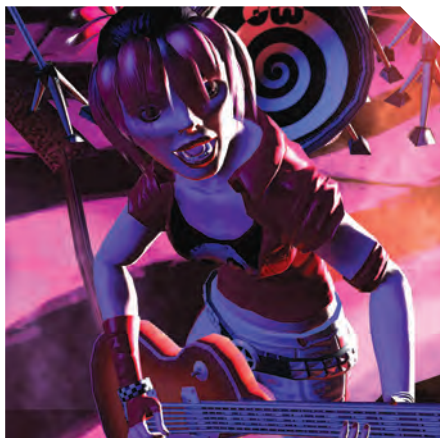
The Turtles have never really left us, at least not in the past few years. Not too long ago, Konami released an adequate but lacklustre *Turtles* game that just didn't grab our attention. However, with a new movie, the series opened the chance for a new game and Ubisoft jumped at the opportunity. *Turtles* makes you appreciate how good Ubisoft can be with licensed material, because the new game is quite terrific. It's just very short and ultimately not a very big challenge for experienced players. Nevertheless, any platformer junkie will enjoy the extremely responsive controls and various acrobatic moves. Old school *TMNT* players will also find a couple of nods to the early classics, especially the Arcade and original NES games. If anything, it gives you many achievements for little work. Unfortunately, its shelf life is a bit short.

**MTX MOTOTRAX (PS2)**

This month, one half of the female review panel is, like, totally butching it up with a clutch (geddit?) of racing games for the PSP. Well, in theory anyway. See, once we had fired up Activision's motocross romper *MTX Mototrax* and discovered that we could customise our rider right down to his shoes, the whole silly racing thing took a bit of a backseat. Colour coordination and a fashionable hairstyle are eminently more important, after all. There's an array of heads to choose for starters, although most of them are a tad unattractive (is it really too much to ask for a licensed likeness of Hugh Jackman?), as well as a modest range of hairstyles and colour rinses. Then there are two basic ensembles to mull over: a 'rough ridin' racing outfit for track events, and some cool chillin' togs for freestyle and free ride events. Eventually we settled on a slate grey- [cut due to nonsense fashion rambling]

**VALKYRIE PROFILE: LENNETH (PSP)**

A port of the original *Valkyrie Profile* from the PSX, *Lenneth* so far appears to be a stunning RPG if you are a newcomer to the series. The backgrounds are lush and detailed, while the newly added cut-scenes specific to this version really go a long way. The combat takes some getting used to, but we haven't had that much playtime with the game yet, so we cannot really comment on it. First impressions indicate that the combat system is actually an exercise in 'Economy of Attack' as you use your four characters in interesting combinations without over-attacking (the game lets you know when you've wasted potential damage). Gathering souls for Valhalla (Ragnarok is on the horizon and the gods need warriors to fight for them) might be quite enjoyable, from the looks of it.

**GUITAR HERO II (360)**

Are you ready to Rock? Damn, how many times have we used that line to kick off anything about the *Guitar Hero* series? Well, not enough, because if you don't own this game yet, we can't die happy. It's as simple as that. Unless you are completely lacking in rhythm – for example, you're a zombie – or you think that rock music is still the domain of the Dark Prince, there is no reason to not get this game. In fact, a console might not even be needed, since it turns out the 360's wired USB controller works on Frets on Fire. However, that should be your last resort. After only an hour or so the 360 version of *Guitar Hero 2* screams 'definitive' from the stage before doing a belly flop onto its audience. And we all love it, grabbing at the game's sweaty body and clumsily throwing our underwear at it. All that's really lacking is online support for multiplayer.

**SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (PS3)**

What the hell is this? Not only does *Sonic* take for-freaking-ever to load, it takes like 20 seconds to load a three-second cut-scene (and that cut-scene ONLY contains Fox McTails, or whatever he's called, saying, "Lets go, Sonic!" in a totally gay way), and then it LOADS AGAIN. The graphics are terrible, the voice acting is worse than *Sonic Adventures* and the entire game is buggy as hell. It was PAINFUL to play past the first scene where you have to run around this pointless city doing pointless things, and when we finally got into the first level, it just went downhill from there. SEGA, what the hell? Stop trying to remake *Sonic Adventures*!

**TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED (PS2)**

The marvellous and big *Test Drive Unlimited* has already shown its colours on the powerhouses known as the 360 and PC. Now it's heading to... the PlayStation 2. Yes, it's quite tempting to disregard this console since the more powerful next generation has arrived, but clearly, it's a mistake to sell it short like that. Granted, in this version Atari had to make some changes to accommodate the more limited hardware, so the textures and a few other cosmetic details take a bow. Nevertheless, it's still the same game in its glorious size, boasting the same exotics in its garages and the same smooth control system that makes *TDU* a pleasure to play. If you've wanted *TDU*, but don't own a 360 or PC, this is definitely a good alternative. We still have to see if there is any online support, though.

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SYSTEM SHOCK

IT IS NOT UNCOMMON for a game to do practically everything right and even contribute several advancements to a genre and still be a financial failure, but it is rare. Back in 1994, developer Looking Glass Technologies, also known for the critically acclaimed *Thief* series, released *System Shock*: a first-person title where you assumed the role of a nameless hacker in a cyberpunk vision of 2072. In contrast to other first-person titles of the time, *System Shock* actually featured true 3D environments where you could look up, down, climb, duck and lean out to the side.

The plot follows the nameless hacker as he is caught attempting to remotely access files related to Citadel Station (a space station owned by TriOptimum Corporation). The hacker is sent to Citadel Station and there, executive Edward Diego offers to drop all charges in exchange for the hacking of SHODAN, the AI that controls Citadel. After hacking SHODAN and removing the ethical constraints, you get some surgery and wake up six months later to find that the station has been taken over by the now insane SHODAN. The game actually starts here and takes you on a genuinely frightening journey throughout the station as you try to stop SHODAN from destroying earth.

Along the way, you meet several characters via audio logs that explain back-story and situations, as well as giving you leads you can follow for better hardware upgrades. Eventually, the station is set to self-destruct by SHODAN and you have literally an hour to save yourself (the time limit is removed if you pick the Easy setting related to the plot - the game actually has several difficulty settings for the puzzles, combat and other aspects of the game).

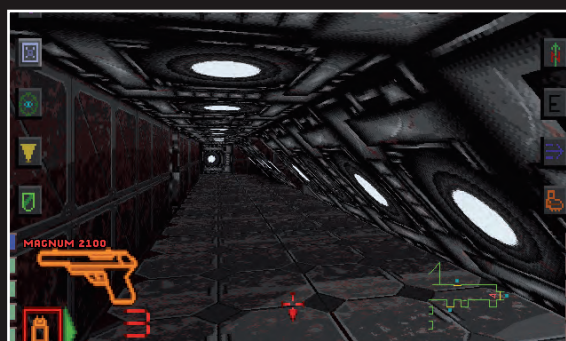
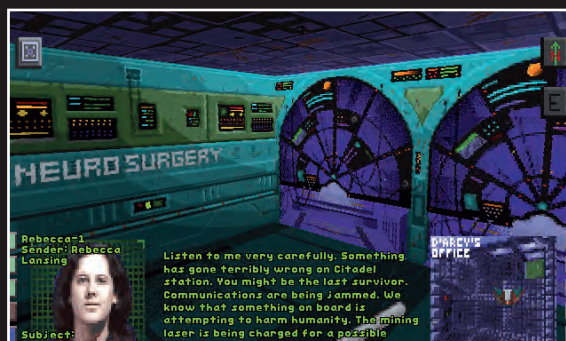
System Shock borrowed many interface ideas from *Ultima Underworld* (also by Looking Glass), such as the free-moving

mouse cursor for aiming or manipulating objects or using the HUD. Using the interface, you could lean left or right, look up or down, crouch, crawl or sort your inventory. Throughout the game, you collect hardware upgrades for your neural implant, including head-mounted lanterns, motion boosting and targeting systems. The first one you find is a log disc player, which remains the core of the plot and is used to advance the story. The audio that plays from the logs, to this day, remains creepy and unnerving. Sounds in the audio logs may cause you to turn around expecting a robot or monster behind you. Later you find a rear-view camera upgrade that doesn't really help and just makes you even more nervous.

Probably the coolest part of the game, the Cyberspace terminals let you move around weightlessly in a wire-frame 3D environment, collecting data and fighting security programs in an almost *Descent*-like manner. Parts of the station can be manipulated in Cyberspace, letting you unlock doors.

There was a surprising depth to *System Shock* - even the weapons allowed for multiple ammunition types. Attacking with specific weapons and ammunition types worked better on certain enemies and worse on others - the electromagnetic pulse worked great on robots but didn't do squat to mutants. Once you found a specific hardware module, you could actually see the damage dealt.

It's difficult to find an FPS today that hasn't benefited from the major innovations made in *System Shock*, which has been inducted into many a gaming Hall of Fame. *System Shock* has aged well, and if it were ever ported to the Nintendo DS, it would be playable without any changes made and would even (to the untrained eye) pass as a game developed recently. **NAG**



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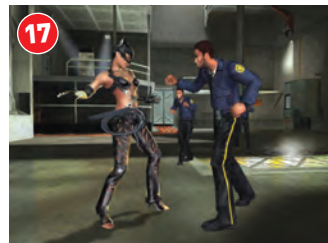
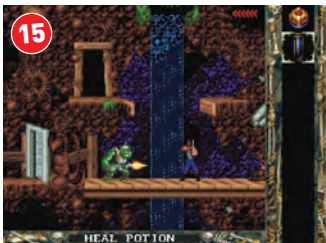
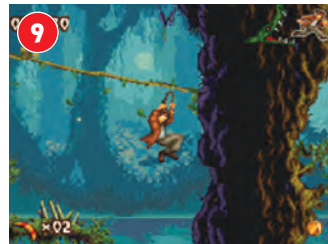
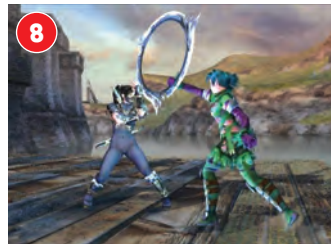
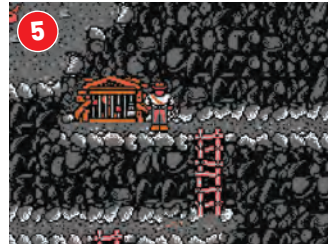
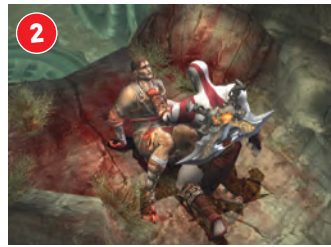


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CRACK THAT WHIP!

WHIPS ARE CONSIDERED A more exotic weapon in games and you don't see them nearly as often as knives, clubs, guns, railguns, thermo-nuclear bombs and things that vapourise planets. But you do get them out there, in some fashion or another. Maybe it's leather, maybe it's a sword of some kind, maybe they were seared to your skin in the form of chains and two big blades [hint]. So, can you name the game?



1 Rygar; 2 God of War; 3 King of Fighters 99; 4 Double Dragon; 5 Indiana Jones & Temple of Doom; 6 Earthworm Jim; 7 Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project; 8 Soul Calibur; 9 Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure; 10 Castleania: Symphony of the Night; 11 Prince of Fighters 99; 12 Call of Juarez; 13 Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal; 14 Black Belt; 15 Black Belt; 16 Black Belt; 17 Catwoman; 18



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PlayStation®2



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HD FORMAT BATTLE GOES TO ALL-OUT WAR

THE EARLY SKIRMISHES IN the battle between Sony's Blu-ray Disc and Toshiba's HD DVD for the next-generation video standard seem to have been just the probing stage. Both companies have suddenly opened up and come out swinging, and there's no clear victor in sight.

Sony's launch of the PS3 outside the US and Japan has increased the number of Blu-ray-capable devices dramatically. However, claims that Blu-ray is outselling HD DVD are being countered by Toshiba, saying that the majority of these numbers are PS3 owners redeeming a voucher for a free copy of *Casino Royale* bundled with the console. Toshiba apparently takes the threat seriously, and is slashing prices on HD DVD players. They claim they will continue to undercut the price of Blu-ray players in the future. Toshiba says HD DVD's popularity in China will result in lots of cheap players, giving them the price advantage. Sony has also cut overall home theatre prices by introducing cheaper 1,080p HD projectors.

Blu-ray may in fact be its own worst enemy, as a recent announcement that the standard would be changing as of 31 October has left many early adopters furious. The change involves an update to BD-Java capabilities to support more features such as picture-in-picture and commentary. While some players with Ethernet ports, such as the PS3, will be able to update, many owners of very expensive Blu-ray players are out of luck, and the older discs may not even work on the newer players.

The rest of the industry is still playing wait and see. Warner announced that it intends to produce its



dual-mode discs that feature Blu-ray on one side and HD DVD on the other. HD DVD recently beat Blu-ray in the Home Cinema Choice awards for video quality, which Toshiba attributes to using better codecs on the discs. They claim that the codec advantage negates Blu-ray's space advantage, and claim the new 51GB

triple-layer HD DVD will give them a clear lead in video quality.

However, the tempest may not have left the teacup yet. Online rental giant Netflix reports that Blu-ray and HD DVD rentals comprise only 1% of the current demand.

GAMETRAK HEADS TO SA

CAN'T GET A WII? Unfortunately, Nintendo's prolific little console doesn't seem to be anywhere close to launch locally and most local gamers have to make do with their more conventional controllers. However, golf enthusiasts do have an option coming soon. Local distributor MobileG has secured the rights to bring the Gametrak PS2 peripheral to South Africa. Plugging into your trusty PlayStation 2, Gametrak is a motion-sensing setup that reminds us of the XaviX, except that it uses a console instead of providing its own. The gloves included are picked up by wires plugged into the PS2, allowing the games to pick up your motions, such as the swing of a golf club.

However, the system is designed for specific games, such as *Real World Golf 2007*, which is bundled with the Gametrak package. The hardware can track swing speeds up to 2,000mph and tracks movements as small as 1mm. This all translates to an exceptional golf game that knows where a ball will land as if the player hit a real golf ball on a real golf course. At least, that's what the press release says. Gametrak will also support games from other sports and perhaps even other types of games, but it would definitely beat the lacking physicality of timing your shots on an analogue controller. The Gametrak bundle will initially be sold exclusively in Musica stores nationwide.



LCDS BIG AND SMALL

FOR ANYONE STILL CLINGING desperately to their CRT behemoths and decrying LCD response times (or anything else that justifies their owning something so dreadfully unfashionable), the time has come to shut up and migrate. Samsung, in particular, is rolling out some real monsters. The 30-inch SyncMaster XL30, for example, boasts a 2,560 x 1,600 resolution, 3,000:1 contrast ratio and a 2ms response time, and doubles up as an HDTV. It's also one of the forerunners in the LED-backlit monitor derby, a new technology developed to generate pure colours with spectral accuracy.

LG, meanwhile, has trotted out a range of flat panel, 1,080p plasma TVs, from 32- to 60-inch form factors, and available with both plastic and wood finishes. Not to be outdone, Sharp has revealed three prototypes for 108-inch goliaths, capable of resolutions of up to 2,160p (4,096 x 2,160), as well as two new Aquos TVs. These TVs, available in 46- and 52-inch form factors, support 1,080p resolution, and feature a 4ms response time, a contrast ratio of 3,000:1 and an interpolated picture refresh rate of 100Hz. Oh, and they're also DVRs, packing in a 160GB HDD for good measure.

And from the sublime to the possibly ridiculous, and almost certainly impractical, relatively unknown Italian manufacturers Technovision unveiled a gargantuan 205-inch, LED-backlit HDTV at CeBIT 2007. That's about the size of two queen-sized beds. You'd probably have to sell everything you own to buy one, but can you imagine playing *Gears of War* on something that huge?



TWO, FOUR, SIX, EIGHT, WHO WILL PC OWNERS HATE?

DIEHARD PC FANBOYS ARE going to find it increasingly difficult to snipe Mac users in the future, as Apple's darlings start packing a pretty formidable arsenal. The company recently revealed its seriously respectable eight-core Intel Xeon-based Mac Pro, featuring two (ultra rare) 3GHz quad-core Xeon 5300-series processors, 16MB of Level 2 cache, and a 1.33GHz FSB. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the machine ships with just 1GB of RAM and an NVIDIA GeForce 7300GT. Nonetheless, an optimistic Apple spokesperson declared that, "The eight-core Mac offers greater performance for some processing-intensive tasks, such as 3D modelling, animation and scientific applications." In the meantime, Apple will continue to produce lower-end Mac Pro systems with two dual-core Intel Xeon 5100-series processors, and clock speeds of 2.0GHz, 2.66GHz, or 3.0GHz.

While Dell offers a similar package with its Precision 690 (two 2.66GHz quad-core Xeon chips, 1GB of RAM), the Mac slides in at more than \$1,000 less.



GIGABYTE ANNOUNCES GEFORCE 8600S, WITH BETTER GAME BUNDLES

GIGABYTE PLANS TO UP the ante in the bundled games category, starting with its new 8600-based cards. While many graphics cards often come with games that weren't that great even when they were new several years ago, Gigabyte seems to have another idea. Since most graphics cards are roughly identical these days, they're improving their bundle with newer, high-end games like *Supreme Commander*, and building their box art around them to differentiate themselves from the competition. They've also started incorporating their improved-reliability solid capacitors that proved popular on their recent motherboards.



HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

OUR HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5** The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, I probably already have.
- 4** A good deal; worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3** About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.
- 2** This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.
- 1** The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.



GROUND ZERO

by Toby Hudon

OF LEMONS AND BANANAS

Exclusivity hurts everybody.

THE REASON WHY THAT sentence is up there by itself is that I'm hoping some people will at least read it and remember it. I originally wrote about this subject for a column in the late *Custom PC SA*, but unfortunately those words never made it to print. However, they bear repeating, so repeat them I shall.

Exclusivity hurts everybody.

Now, for this to make sense I need to do some explaining. Some people think I have no idea "how things work around here" since I've only been living in this country for a couple of years. However, when you work in an industry like PC hardware, you'll pick up the gist of how things work eventually. I'm sure everyone is familiar with the high local prices and availability issues and other problems, and I've heard things from crime to conspiracy given as reasons. However, like most things, the reality is usually about twice as bad as you hope and half as bad as you fear.

I think one of the problems here is outdated attitudes towards PC hardware. I was told that for a long time in this country PCs had been exorbitantly expensive, even more than they are now. The thing is, extremely high prices tend to generate an atmosphere of exclusivity. Only certain people are "in the club" as such, i.e. the ones who could afford them. These people tend to be very brand-loyal and brag about the brands they buy, much like with other expensive items such as cars or designer clothes. However, things have changed. PC hardware is now a commodity, and has been in the rest of the world for some time. This is incompatible with a prestige-based marketing approach, because, well, it's a commodity. I'll explain.

Let's say I want a banana. I happen to like bananas and eat them occasionally. If I go out to the supermarket to buy one, there are several concerns on my mind regarding purchasing bananas. One is likely to be, "How many am I going to buy?" But this is rarely important as these days bananas are quite modular and come in a variety of serving sizes from single up to about half a dozen in convenient bunches. Most likely I'll be more concerned about the ripeness value. If I plan on keeping a bunch of bananas around for a while, I'll probably want slightly green ones so they don't go bad so fast. If I just want one to eat for breakfast, I'll probably want a yellow one. If I'm making my grandmother's famous banana cake, I'll likely want already browning ones since that's what the recipe specifies.

Nevertheless, I'm not going to actually give a damn if it's a Dole banana or a Chiquita banana.

I can't recall the specific branding on a banana ever being a

concern in its purchase. I know they do have brands, and I know I've seen those little stickers that identify the particular source of bananas. However, I really can't recall a single time it mattered. If I went to a supermarket and told someone "I'll only buy this brand of bananas!" I'd probably receive some very interesting looks and notice people slowly backing away from me. However, say it about cars and people nod their heads at you.

The point of this whole exercise is that PC Component Company A and PC Component Company B are not Mercedes and BMW. They're Dole and Chiquita.

They, like almost all other OEMs in the PC hardware market, make a commodity product where **brand doesn't matter**. When I shop for a motherboard, do you think I go looking for the brand name first? No. I look for the chipset I want, see if it has the right number of slots and ports, maybe a decent layout or the right form factor for my case, and then I go comparing prices of everyone who meets all of the above criteria. That is, when people let you compare prices. For we all know it would be absolutely impossible for people to be able to compare prices on products without bowing and grovelling for sacred price lists. It's not as if you could just look them up all over the Internet along with the current exchange rate to realise just how inflated things are around here, right?

Anyway, this is more about branding. My point is that this exclusive distributor thing is BS. It's a bad idea all around. Tying your business to a single brand means your fortunes wax and wane with theirs, and every OEM in the PC market has up and down quarters and lemon products. All this does is force your customers to go to other distributors to buy products that don't suck at that point in time to get what they want. Which annoys them because they now need to go and build a relationship with another company, since you don't offer the product they want. This is obviously bad for the distributors, as it drives customers away and reduces sales. As for the OEMs, it's bad there too. Let's say your distributor goes under and you had an exclusive deal. Now what? You need to re-enter the local market, and build a new relationship with a distributor from scratch.

Therefore, as we can see, exclusivity hurts everyone - customers, distributors, and OEMs alike. There is no benefit from claiming exclusivity, because PC hardware is not a "good ol' boys club" community, it's a commodity market. This is why the rest of the world doesn't waste their time with this crap. I think it's about time we start waking up to reality around here. Why the OEMs haven't forced all the distributors to discard this ridiculous policy is beyond me - usually the guys in Taiwan are much smarter about their business than that. If I can run the numbers, I don't see why they can't, or haven't. **NAG**

■ ■ The point of this whole exercise is that PC Component Company A and PC Component Company B are not Mercedes and BMW. They're Dole and Chiquita. ■ ■





HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

GRAPHICS FOR YOU

IT MAY BE FAIRLY obvious to some which graphics cards they need, or even better, which they want. If you've been buying at the high end since as far back as you can remember, then your decisions are largely based purely on performance and not necessarily price. Granted, the recent hike in graphics card prices has caused many to reconsider, while many more are still unaffected by the massive price increase over the last generation graphics cards.

There is no way to make sure this advice is relevant irrespective of time, but every attempt was made to avoid pointing to specific graphics cards or chips (rather pointing to specific price points and the performance that usually comes in at those prices). One of the mistakes that many make is disregarding the future of their purchases. Indeed, it's not wise to always wait for the next best thing. However, it isn't wise to look at your current game performance and base your purchasing decision solely on that. It is also not wise to base your purchasing decision on resale price alone as that is tied squarely to the performance of the graphics card.

Usually, or at least one hopes nobody buys outside of their price range, game framerates and Futuremark benchmarks are what we look at prior to pricing or anything of the sort. This is fine and well if everything or if anything discussed in the review applies to you. If it doesn't, despite the impressive or poor performance you may perceive, you haven't learnt anything of use to you.

For instance, one has to assume by now that most people using LCDs, or even 19-inch CRTs for that matter, employ a 1,280 x 1,024 resolution for their gaming, media and for their desktop. For CRTs, this is not so much a limit as it is for LCDs, where most 19-inch and 17-inch units can only make use of the 1,280 x 1,024 resolution at best. In any case, if this is your benchmarking resolution, then it should be fairly obvious that looking at game results at 1,920 x 1,200 is meaningless as you're unlikely to be gaming at that resolution in the near future. Therefore, what should concern you are your native resolution and its applied effects.

Not so much with 1,600 x 1,200, but 1,280 x 1,024, while better than 1,024 x 768 by some degree, still leaves undesired staircase artifacts at the edge of textures and models. 2x AA doesn't really do much, but 4x AA does. So if you're buying a graphics card that you want to last you at least a year and age with grace, then 1,280 x 1,024 with 4x AA and 16x AF are what you should be looking at.

The reason for this is simple: 4x AA has a greater frame buffer and bandwidth load than 1,600 x 1,200 and is about a match for a 1,920 x 1,200 resolution. (This is not a mathematical or technical relationship, but just a pure observation.) If the graphics card you want is capable in all games across the board at these settings (please assume 16x AF for everything said here), then you pretty much have a good purchase right there. I won't go into what's an acceptable framerate and what isn't, but in general, you're looking for at least 30fps. If you're looking at buying a graphics card in that price range and these are the performance numbers you're seeing on review sites, then your purchasing decision has been made far easier. Sure, you could buy a graphics card that performs a little better here and there, but watch out that you don't go outside your budget.

Looking further into the 1,280 x 1,024 resolution, in most of the cases you will see that when the render size is changed to 1,600 x 1,200 with 2x AA and then to 1,920 x 1,200 with no AA, the same framerate can be kept. That means should you decide to buy a larger screen, say a 22-inch LCD, then your current graphics card will scale very well with the larger display area (usually at a sharper display too) of 1,650 x 1,050 or so. Sure, you will have to drop the AA setting to 2x instead of 4x, but the experience on that display at those given settings will be better than your last experience on the smaller display with a higher level of AA.

Purchasing in such a manner, or somewhat close to this, almost guarantees that your purchase will last you far longer than one that was made by looking at numbers alone. It also makes sure you never pay for more than you need. **NAG**

Indeed, it's not wise to always wait for the next best thing. However, it isn't wise to look at your current game performance and base your purchasing decision solely on that.



ASUS WL-700gE

The Multi-Functional Wireless Storage Center and Router

Wireless connectivity and digital content have infiltrated every faucet of our lives. For some going a whole day without these two technological innovations is simply absurd. Today, let us take a look at the ASUS WL-700gE wireless storage center/router, which is an excellent solution for downloading, storing and organizing digital content and sharing them wirelessly with friends, family and customers.

Versatile download

The WL-700gE incorporated Download Master that enables smart features for downloading files, which includes support for the latest BitTorrent protocol. Download Master enables peer-to-peer downloads and download queue prioritization from remote locations. Tell the WL-700gE what you need to download from a system at the office or school, and when you get home, all the downloaded files will be safely organized in the WL-700gE.

The WL-700gE can also execute download applications without connection to a system, leaving more resource for other computing functions and maintaining the mobility of notebook PCs. For music entertainment, the WL-700gE supports the popular Apple iTunes interface to manage music files in orderly fashion. Locating the right song only takes seconds.

Easy WLAN setup

As a wireless router, the WL-700gE offers both Network Address Translation (NAT) and Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP) server functions. NAT allows all devices within the network to share the same IP address, while DHCP automatically assigns IP address to devices that are connected to the WLAN to avoid complicated configuration setup.

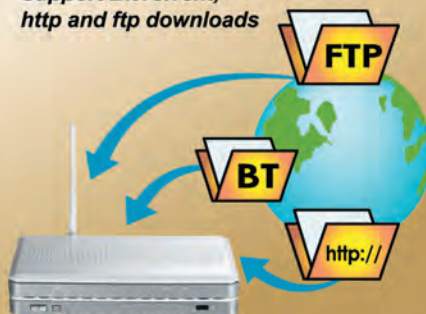
Always thought WLAN technologies are sort of intimidating? Fret no more. The WL-700gE, with EZ Setup, lets you enjoy the different applications in just a few simple steps. You can also set higher bandwidth priority for streaming media to guarantee smooth viewing and listening experience without interruptions from other bandwidth-eating applications.

Ample storage capacity

Equipped with a 160GB hard drive and supporting the USB interface for external hard drive connection, the WL-700gE provides the storage capacity needed as a multimedia center.

For file backup, the RAID 1 mirror function can create a copy of everything from the internal hard drive and save it to the external hard drive. And for convenient data sharing, the WL-700gE comes with a COPY button. When USB disks and memory cards are attached to the WL-700gE, press the COPY button and automatically save all information in the external devices to the storage center.

**Support BitTorrent,
http and ftp downloads**



**168GB hard
drive included**



**USB 2.0 enables Plug-n'-Share
webcam, printer, external hard
drive etc.**



**Elegant design for
all environments**

Faster and longer range

Supporting both 802.11b and g wireless standards and BroadRange technology to triple signal coverage range, the WL-700gE completely resolved inconsistent signals at dead corners. For large, complex multimedia content, activate 125* High-Speed Mode to enhance data transfer speeds by 35% compared to standard 802.11g devices.

Plug-n-Share

Connect webcams, printers and external hard drives to the WL-700gE via USB 2.0, and share their functions with other devices in the WLAN. Roam around with a laptop and still be able to monitor different areas of your home, print documents and access information in the hard drive.

Build a secured wireless network

A WLAN built upon the WL-700gE offers multiple layer protection. Through MAC filter, network IP filter and SPI firewall packet filter, your WLAN is protected from unauthorized access, including DoS attacks.

A must have for digitizing your home

The WL-700gE offers comprehensive features that are difficult for conventional network hard drives and self-assembled storage solutions to match. Easily store and access data wirelessly, manage multimedia content, and increase network performance. It's simply a must have for any home wireless network.

A Computer MAGAZINE MAGAZINE



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ASUS EN8800GTX AQUATANK

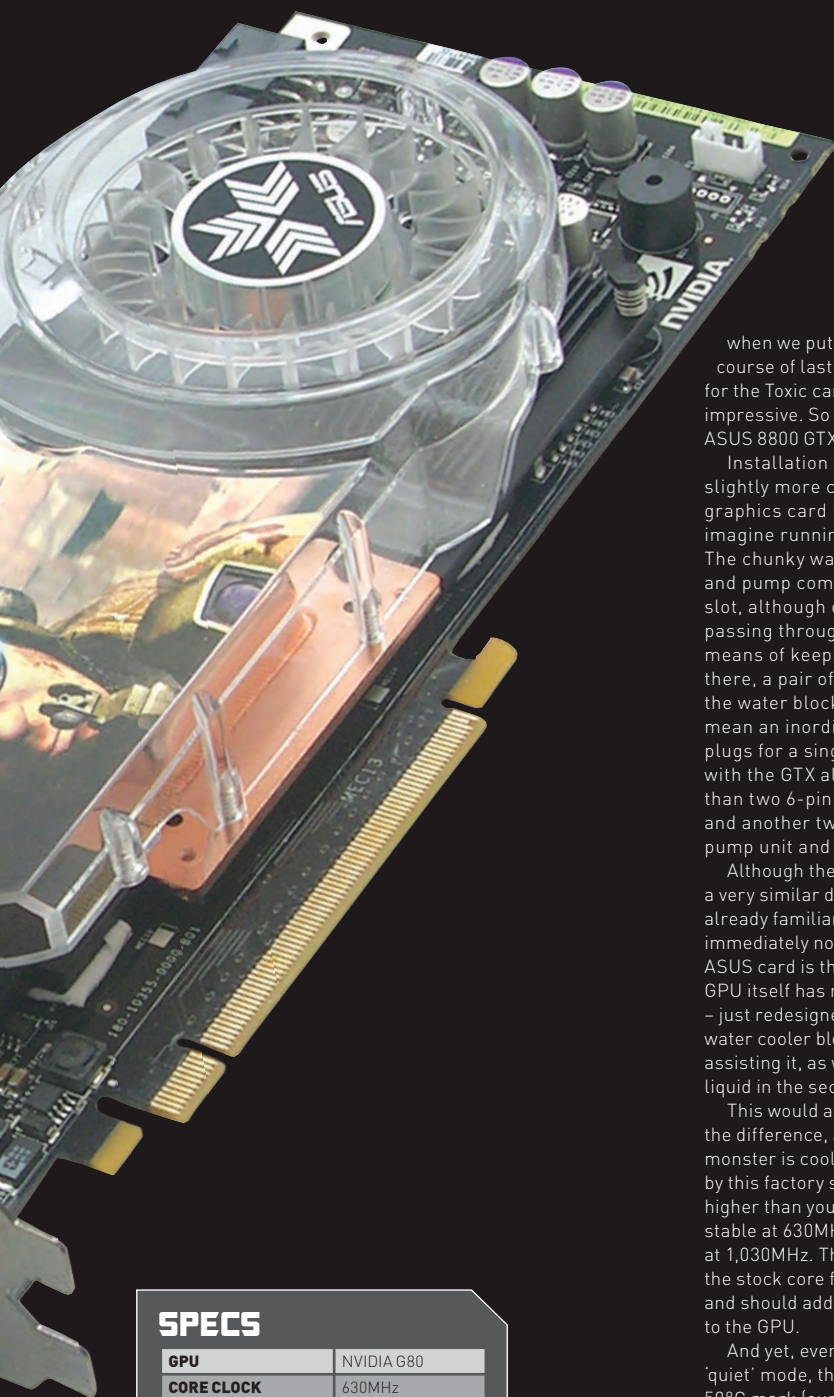
SO, ALL 8800-SERIES GRAPHICS cards are created pretty much equal, aren't they? Well, that really has been the case up until now, but it seems the tide is shifting towards individual manufacturers offering their own unique flavours of this range-topping graphics subsystem once more. This month alone, we've seen two 8800 GTX cards taking their own routes to get every last iota of performance potential from this excellent NVIDIA chipset.

First there was the very interesting Calibre unit, cooled by a Peltier arrangement rather than merely the standard HSF to unlock higher frequencies

on both core and RAM. Now this: the slightly more conventional but nonetheless intriguing ASUS EN8800GTX Aquatank.

Naturally, as the name suggests, we're looking at a factory, water-cooled iteration of the all-powerful 8800 GTX here. And lo and behold, it's using the exact same Thermaltake all-in-one VGA water cooler already employed by Sapphire in its ultimate Radeon line-up, the Toxic range, with limited success.

It's worrying really, especially considering that the standalone Thermaltake product failed to truly impress in our baking SA temperatures



SPECS

GPU	NVIDIA G80
CORE CLOCK	630MHz
SHADER VERSION	3.0
PIPELINES	128
VIDEO MEMORY	768MB
MEMORY CLOCK	1,030MHz
MEMORY BUS	384-bit

SCORE



BETTER THAN:
All air-cooled 8800GTX cards

WORSE THAN:
Sparkle Calibre P880+

when we put one to the test during the course of last year. They were improved for the Toxic cards, but still failed to be impressive. So how can it really help the ASUS 8800 GTX?

Installation of the Aquatank is only slightly more complex than a 'normal' graphics card installation. Just don't imagine running a pair of these in SLI! The chunky water radiator, reservoir and pump combination occupies a PCI slot, although of course, there's no data passing through the bus – it's merely a means of keeping the unit upright. From there, a pair of pipes snakes across to the water block on the card itself. It does mean an inordinate amount of power plugs for a single component however, with the GTX already requiring no less than two 6-pin PCI-E power connectors, and another two Molex connectors for the pump unit and the HSF.

Although the water cooler is clearly of a very similar design to the ones we're already familiar with, one thing you will immediately notice as different on this ASUS card is that the HSF attached to the GPU itself has not simply been removed – just redesigned. This means that the water cooler block has active air-cooling assisting it, as well as a fan cooling the liquid in the secondary radiator unit.

This would appear to have made all the difference, as this ASUS Aquatank monster is cooled extremely effectively by this factory setup. It's clocked a touch higher than your average GTX: the core is stable at 630MHz while the RAM clocks in at 1,030MHz. That's a good 65MHz up on the stock core frequency of the vanilla GTX, and should add a fair amount of extra heat to the GPU.

And yet, even with the radiator-fan in 'quiet' mode, this card idles at around the 50°C mark (our reference, stock 8800 GTX idles at 12-15 degrees higher). What's more, a few hours of benchmarking during the last truly hot days of summer, and the core never once exceeded 70°C. Switch the radiator fan to its noisier, more aggressive setting and it'll never even get past 66°C.

It's all very impressive really, considering that the GTX with just a reference air cooler attached gets warmer and warmer the longer you play, easily hitting mid-80s after an hour or so. And this lower end part is clocked a full 105MHz slower!

So how do those extra clock cycles help you to support your pricey and comparatively unusual GPU purchase?

Let's run some tests....

We'd imagine that, by now, everyone knows that the 8800 GTX is the most powerful graphics card available. The ATI R600 looks promising, although early 'leaked' results indicate that it isn't that far ahead of the NVIDIA GTX, and this souped-up version is likely to be an even closer call. The added clock cycles boost the performance up by about 10% overall, which is an extremely fine performance benefit to pile on top of what is already the world's fastest GPU!

This boost helped our Intel Q6600-powered test setup to record an excellent baseline figure of 11,700 in 3DMark05, and the GPU wasn't even sweating. Nor would it ever throughout testing thanks to the more efficient Thermaltake water-cooling rig. Switching from 1,024 x 768 to 1,280 x 1,024 and adding 8x AA and 16x AF into the mix saw this result drop by barely 1,000 points. Even more impressively, upping it to 1,600 x 1,200 saw an even smaller decrease of the overall result.

In the more up to date 3DMark06, the higher frequencies of this card delivered a default run result of 8,950. With AA and AF cranked right up, this more shader-intensive version of Futuremark's benchmark took more strain, recording a still-impressive 7,290 using these settings. Still, the Aquatank failed to wilt, and higher resolutions steadily decreased the overall score, but we ended our runs hovering around 5,000 – at 1,920 x 1,440.

Our stock GTS and single X1950XTX test cards just couldn't keep up. And, of course, the NVIDIA architecture is still the only one to support DirectX 10...

Our games tests supported these synthetic results, and *Company of Heroes*, *Quake 4*, *F.E.A.R.* and even *Far Cry* had never run so smoothly or looked so good.

Even more modern titles, like *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and *Test Drive Unlimited*, are quite content at maximum detail. In fact, the Aquatank seemed to be quite a bit more stable than the ASUS 8800 GTS in these newer games, which could easily be the result of lower operating temperatures. This despite the respectable OC even...

This, then, is the ultimate 8800 GTX in our opinion, effectively combining a decent as well as extremely stable overclock by keeping temperatures controlled using a more efficient Thermaltake Tidewater liquid-cooling system. It's the card to get if you're looking for the best of the best right now. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

SPARKLE CALIBRE P880+ OC EDITION

OVER THE YEARS, SPARKLE has grown from offering reference-based graphics cards to being truly innovative, as in the case of the P880+ we had for review. By now, you should be well versed with what the G80 GPU can do and the kind of performance to expect from any graphics card based on the 8800GTX. Sparkle, not content with just receiving a reference card and slapping on its designated sticker, has gone beyond the norm in two key areas. These make all the difference and make the P880+ arguably the best 8800GTX you can buy.

Sparkle has equipped the P880+ with an HDCP chip, making it HDTV-ready in all ways. This addition makes the P880+ very attractive as this simple but necessary chip makes it compatible with almost every single display available. What would have made the card near perfect would have been the inclusion of VIVO capabilities,

but sadly, these are missing. However, this shouldn't sway anyone away from the P880+, as it is one fine product. With the P880+, Sparkle has chosen the reference design PCB as all others, but has fitted it with a TEC (thermoelectric cooler) that surprisingly enough works really well. This must be the highlight feature of the P880+. The TEC is lighter than the reference cooler and makes for a rather interesting card, as it looks better than many 8800GTX cards and operates at much lower temperatures. While we had doubted whether the TEC would be up to it, the unit performed very well and even beyond expectations. For instance, a regular 800GTX in our environment can idle at 65°C and load at 85°C. With the P880+, idle temperatures were as low as 58°C and loads at 65-67°C. What made these temperatures even more impressive was that both core and

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HARDWARE
AWARD ★



SPECS

GPU	NVIDIA G80
CORE CLOCK	630MHz
SHADER VERSION	4.0
PIPELINES	128
VIDEO MEMORY	768MB
MEMORY CLOCK	980MHz (1,960MHz DDR)
MEMORY BUS	384-bit

SCORE



BETTER THAN:
ASUS EN8800GTX Aquatank

WORSE THAN:
Two Sparkle Calibre P880+ cards



memory were increased from reference speeds. The core is preset at 630MHz while the memory is set at 980MHz (1,960MHz effective), which give the card even greater levels of performance making it amongst the fastest 8800GTX-based cards available today and certainly the fastest available locally.

The performance numbers were nothing short of impressive, with the P880+ edging out the reference 8800GTX at every single turn and making 2,048 x 1,536 playable with 8x AA in games such as *Quake 4* and *Company of Heroes*. There was nothing we could throw at this card that it couldn't handle. As far as overclocking goes, the P880+ tops out pretty much where all other 8800s do at the 640-675MHz range. Luckily, the P880+ managed a solid 675MHz on the core and 2,060MHz on the memory. With the overclocked speeds there was no real

tangible difference in game performance as the X6800 was not capable of pushing out the frames fast enough to make use of the higher clocks. As mentioned earlier, the cooling employed by the P880+ is amongst the best and is very efficient as far as TECs go. When set to the above clocks, the core still remained cool and only saw the load temperature rise to 68°C, which is still 17°C cooler than what we usually get with other 8800GTX cards.

There isn't a single thing that we could really fault the P880+ with, because as far as 8800GTX cards go, they are arguably the best money can buy and offer the best bang for buck. One would be hard pressed to find another 8800GTX with this much individuality and performance all in one package. The only gripe one might have with this graphics card is the added power requirements, as this card is said to

require a minimum of a 500W PSU with a +12V rail of 30A, which is not easy to come by even in some well-known 550W units. However, chances are that if you are in the market for an 8800GTX, you already have a more than capable 600W or higher PSU. Having said that, we wouldn't recommend that you purchase this if you have a PSU that's not capable of outputting at least 600W of power and combined 12V readings of at least 35A, as the TEC needs its own separate cooling, which is powered through a 4-pin 12V Molex connector provided with the card.

Sparkle has shown true innovation given the very restrictive guidelines given by NVIDIA. In every discipline that a graphics card can be measure in, the P880+ is without a doubt the best 8800GTX we have tested here at NAG so far. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



TEAM ELITE DDR800 PC 6400

Team Group Memory has been enjoying great success over the last two years or so and has become as well renowned as other high-speed memory manufacturers. While locally not many were afforded the opportunity to make use of Team RAM during the DDR days, that has changed with DDR2 with many gamers and enthusiasts turning to Team RAM for a number of reasons. One of which is the usually lower price Team RAM costs compared to other first-tier memory modules. With the lower pricing, however, Team still provides great performance, which usually eclipses more expensive sets from other manufacturers.

Team has introduced a new line of RAM under the Elite banner, which is even cheaper than its Dark and Xtrem series. This Elite RAM, as one would expect, doesn't overclock to the same levels as the other sets of RAM, but that doesn't mean it isn't great value for money. On the contrary, the Team Elite can be considered better value than the higher end sets from the other series. We were fortunate enough to have a 2GB Dual Channel DDR800 kit provided to us, and if we were to use one word to describe the set, it would be "superb."

With a retail price matching that of generic DDR667 sets, Team provides DDR800 speeds and higher, stylish aluminium heat spreaders, and best of all, spectacular overclocking results. The RAM may retail for a shade

under R1,700, but the overclocking potential of the RAM is truly phenomenal, particularly when factoring in the price. The RAM is rated at 5-5-5-15 at 800MHz, but we were able to operate the RAM at 3-4-3-9 at DDR800 speeds without increasing the voltage. The performance gain in changing these timings isn't to be underestimated, especially in an AMD AM2 system where RAM timings can account for more than 1GB/sec differences in synthetic tests.

More than the tight timings, however, the maximum stable frequency for this set was 1,080MHz at a comfortable 5-5-5-15 setting, which if it hasn't sunk in yet is PC8600 speeds. This overclock was achieved at a safe 2.1V, which may seem like a high voltage to some, but isn't when dealing with high-speed DDR2 RAM. Team has done such a good job with this kit that it may have overdone it a little: some more expensive sets from the company cannot overclock to these levels with the same timings.

The Team Elite DDR800 set is covered in brushed aluminium that has a better finish than some CPU heatsinks, which makes the Team Elite RAM ideal for those into modding, overclockers and gamers. There is very little to fault this RAM on, if anything at all. When compared to the multiple sets of RAM we had at our disposal, it became clear that as far as price/performance goes, there isn't better RAM than the Team Elite DDR800 locally and

NAG >>>>
HARDWARE
AWARD



SPECS

MEMORY TYPE	DDR2
RATED SPEED	DDR800
TIMINGS	5-5-5-15
MAXIMUM OVERCLOCK	1,080MHz / 5-5-5-15

SCORE



BETTER THAN:
Any other sub-R2,100 set

WORSE THAN:
Team Xtrem DDR800

probably internationally as well.

If you are by some chance unfamiliar with Team Group products, the Team Elite DDR800 will be a lovely introduction, as very few times do products such as these make their way to our corner of the globe. Fortunately for us, Team is distributed locally and the price is relatively the same as the international price.

Should you be looking for a high-speed 2GB set or have a name brand DDR667 set that is not up to the task anymore, you should give the Team Elite DDR800 some serious consideration. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SONIC 20" LCD

RRP→ R3,999 | Supplier→ Sonic

Website→ www.sonicsa.co.za | Brand→ Sonic

ISN'T THIS A GREAT time to be a gamer?

The graphics we've been waiting for have arrived – and often been replaced by even better visuals. Thanks to CG movies, we keep forgetting that games look substantially better than we ever imagined. Take a look at such pre-rendered classics as *Reboot* and you'll realise how far things have come. Therefore, naturally, the time for larger displays has arrived as well. The big thing that held back the CRT monitor is its size and the limited resolutions on CRT television sets. With LCD display prices plummeting, high-resolution television is slowly starting to creep into even South Africa's living rooms. It also means that far more companies are eager to get into the market. Local newcomer Sonic is positioning itself as a very cost-effective local brand with value-for-money mainly thanks to its use of LG panels. This hasn't been my first encounter with Sonic. The company sent a 37-inch LCD to *SACM*, *NAG*'s sister magazine, and overall it was a solid screen at a good price, bar the few problems and missing features you can expect from the lower end of the market.

At first glance, Sonic's 20-inch display has the same hallmarks, which still wouldn't make it a bad buy. It suffers from the same problem: the resolution isn't quite enough to

complement the panel size. Therefore, this LCD makes for a terrible computer screen, but it suffices for media centre interfaces. Likewise, high-res gaming doesn't suffer either, provided that you simply want to move out of SD territory. It won't give you high-resolution HD performance. Strangely, the unit doesn't have a Component input – annoying since Composite looks rubbish on any LCD. The VGA port helps, but that makes this screen a rotten replacement for any standard resolution gaming such as on the PS2. It's nothing you can't get used to, but it certainly is a step back from a CRT of similar or larger size. So, this is really only if you want a small TV with a tuner that can also take a VGA input from a 360 or PS3, if the latter ever gets such a cable. **NAG**

James Francis



SPECS

SIZE	20" (51cm)
RESOLUTION	640 x 480
RESPONSE TIME	8ms
CONTRAST RATIO	500:1
PORTS	Composite, VGA, S-video, Tuner

SCORE



BETTER THAN:

Your old television

WORSE THAN:

An expensive HDTV

HERCULES DJ CONSOLE MK2

RRP→ R3,495 | Supplier→ Tuerk Technologies

Website→ www.tuerkmusic.co.za | Brand→ Hercules

A FEW DECADES AGO, EVERY kid wanted to be an astronaut. Not long after that, every kid wanted to be a guitar god. Today, every kid wants to be a DJ. Can you blame them? Sure, you can find plenty of people who will argue that turntable-ism isn't musical and all DJs do is an advanced form of a cross-fade. However, that idea hardly stands when you look at the mixing marvels produced by Kid Koala, DJ Shadow, The Executioners, Mixmaster Mike, Dan the Automator and anything on a *Dope on Plastic* compilation. On the other hand, all of these artists have years of experience shifting vinyl with surgical precision and mixing sounds without a moment of lapse or conflict. Like a guitar god, you don't become a master DJ overnight, so it's good to start from the bottom and earn your colours.

For that this piece of hardware is more than apt. The main problem with starting to DJ is the cost of equipment. Two digital CD decks and a mixing station can cost you tens of thousands of rands. Even at the lower quality spectrum, your budget has to be more than ten grand. The MK2 is a lot cheaper and easier to set up. All it needs is a USB 2 port and the software on a PC. What it gives you is two 'turntables', outputs to support a third sound source such as a CD player, a mixing

deck and everything you would expect on a standard DJ setup. The basics are on the console. If you want longer loops or more elaborate cues, you need to use the software as well. With the two combined, you can technically achieve what most DJs do with better equipment, although more complicated things won't be as easy. As mentioned, the deck supports an external feed, while the virtual decks can load MP3s.

Simply put, the MK2 seems excellent as an entry-level 'I want to try being a DJ' product. You won't see it in a club or get top names to endorse it as a pro-product, but it's the Fisher-Price of DJ decks at a good price. It's perfect for anyone who always wanted to be a DJ, but can't fork out the cash to get the gear they have to train on. It also comes with a carry strap and protective covers,



SCORE



BETTER THAN:

Scratching on Grandpa's record player

WORSE THAN:

Expensive DJ kit

so once confident, you can use it to play at small parties. At least you won't spend 10K to discover you suck. **NAG**

James Francis

Audio Card Roundup

With onboard sound on many motherboards improving almost year on year, many have turned away from discreet solutions and found that onboard sound can be adequate to allow the immersion in games and the like that discreet solutions provide. Sure, using onboard audio will, for the most part, never match high-quality, standalone units, but onboard sound quality has advanced to such an extent that high-end, gamer-orientated sound cards from a number of years ago are on par with onboard solutions today. With that said, we collected five sound cards and decided to pit them against each other, not so much to see which one had the gamer-orientated features, but to find out which one offers the best package in terms of audio quality and non-gamer-orientated features. Within these cards, there should be one that's just right for your needs.

RAZOR BARRACUDA

Supplier → PC123 | Website → www.pc123.co.za | RRP → R1,539

The Razor Barracuda is one of the most interesting sound cards we have ever come across, not because of the DSP or ADC/DAC used, but the software bundle. Utilising the now-common CMI 8788 DSP, the Barracuda, as you would expect, sounds like most other sound cards that make use of this Processor. The magic of the card is all in the software. With various settings from a normal stereo channel to high-definition 7.1 audio, one is able to set the sound stage to the exact requirements for virtually any sound format and source. This sound card is average at best without the Barracuda headset, but with it, the sound is transformed, particularly when gaming or listening to music with strong bass lines and punchy drums. The headset features an active subwoofer, which vibrates and brings colour to music that you

never thought possible. By no means does it feature the best quality sound, but that isn't the point with this sound card.

With all things said, this sound card and the headset really need to be paired, because each component by itself is less than impressive and really doesn't deserve a second look. Paired, they bring something entirely new to your listening experience. There is truly no other way to describe the sound of this card other than "Fun." Feature-wise, this sound card matches Creative Labs' offering. The Barracuda offers DTS Neo: PC, DTS:Interactive, Dolby Digital Live and Dolby Pro Logic IIx hardware support. That means that it's ready for almost all, if not all, multi-channel formats, and makes the Razor Barracuda not only suitable for gaming, but for serious home theatre use as well.



FEATURES

OUTPUT MODES

Optical Out/ Analogue Out (Stereo mini-jack)

MULTI-CHANNEL MODES

Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital Live, Dolby Pro Logic IIx, DTS Neo:PC,

DTS

Interactive, Dolby Headphones

GAMING FEATURES

EAX, EAX 2.0, DirectSound3D

PLAYBACK

22/44/48/96kHz (24-bit, 192kHz SPDIF)

RECORDING

22/44/48kHz (16-bit)

DRIVER FORMATS

Standard WDM Driver

MIDI

None

ESI JULI@ 4X4 AUDIO INTERFACE

Supplier → Turnkey Music | Website → www.tuerkmusic.co.za | RRP → R1,595

ESI is one of the smaller audio card manufacturers and in general doesn't target the masses like Creative does. That, however, doesn't mean that ESI is no good at manufacturing sound cards: case in point is the ESI Juli@. The ESI Juli@ is a fantastic piece of hardware to look at (it's pure white with gold ¼-inch balanced jacks and RCA jacks), and it's the best-sounding card in this roundup. The Juli@ is more accurately described as an Audio Interface rather than a sound card. For one, you can't really plug a set of headphones into the sound card, nor can you plug anything into it that makes use of a stereo mini-jack. The reason for this is that the Juli@ makes use of four ¼-inch balanced jacks or four RCA jacks, totalling eight possible inputs. How this is achieved is quiet intriguing. The sound card comes in two parts. Out of the box, it has four RCA connectors, but re-assembling the card allows you to make use of the four ¼-inch jacks. This feature is not only useful for DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) systems, but for

the audio enthusiast who is well aware of the superiority in audio quality both RCA and ¼-inch jacks have over stereo mini-jack outputs and inputs.

The Juli@ makes use of high-quality DACs. The DACs are managed by the VIA Envy24-HT DSP, which is capable of 8-channel output. This functionality isn't used, however, when recording or playing back via the analogue connections. Instead, the extra channels are used for monitoring any audio signal.

As for the audio quality, one can only praise the audio clarity and the naturalness of the sound. At this price point or for four to five times the price, there just isn't anything that supersedes the Juli@. If you're listening to gunfire in your favourite FPS or a guitar solo, no other sound card in this roundup even comes close. Best of all though, the driver is small at 175KB compressed. The performance measured in the 3DM03 audio test was the highest as well. The Juli@ is nothing short of brilliant – a work of art from ESI.

FEATURES

OUTPUT MODES

Out/ Analogue Out [4 x RCA, 4 x ¼-inch balanced jacks]

MULTI-CHANNEL MODES

5.1-channel raw audio via Digital Interface [192kHz, 24-bit, 6-channel input & output] 2-channel Stereo+2-Channel Monitor via analogue outputs/inputs

GAMING FEATURES

DirectSound

PLAYBACK

1/4/48/96/176/192kHz [24-bit]

RECORDING

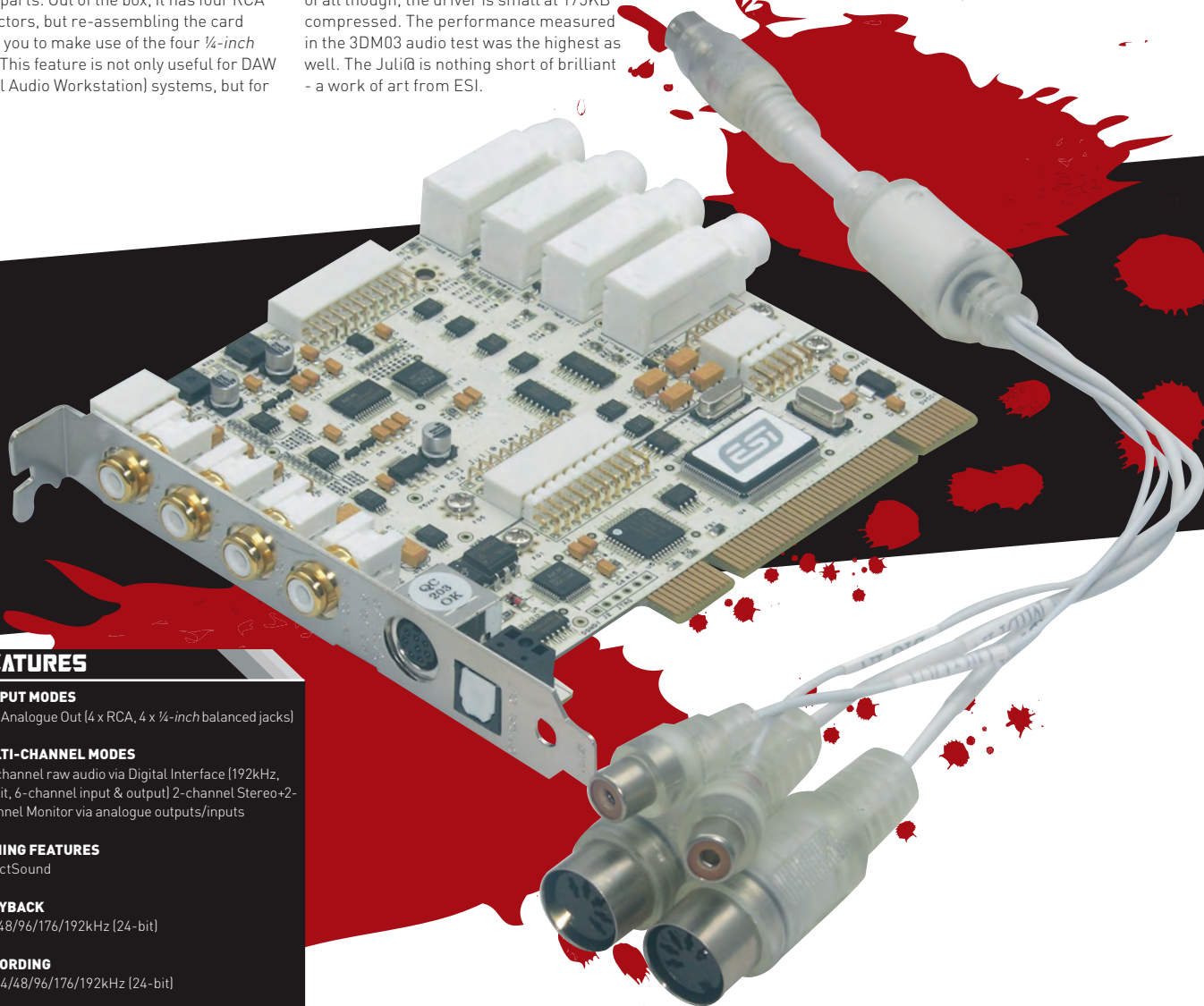
22/44/48/96/176/192kHz [24-bit]

DRIVER FORMATS

WDM, GSIF, ASIO2.0, E-WDM, DirectWire

MIDI

5-pin DIN (In/Out)



E-MU 0202 USB 2.0

Supplier → Turnkey Music | Website → www.turnkeymusic.co.za | RRP → R1,595

E-MU will be well known to those of you who have, at one point or another, had an interest in recording or producing music on your computers. The company is not new to audio production, and over the years has gained incredible experience in the science of sound, particularly as far as computers are concerned. This is evident in the E-MU 0202. In not so many words, this is the baby of the 0-series and is eclipsed by the 0404, 1212M, etc. In many ways, however, the 0202 has one up on the others in that it is external, and as such doesn't suffer from component electrical noise in the PC. This makes it sound slightly better than the 0404, which has been a firm favourite of many over the last few years. The 0202 actually stands for

two inputs and two outputs. The audio hub is purely stereo and as such is not ideal for those who would want to make use of it in any other environment other than in stereo playback and recording. The sampling quality of the 0202, however, more than makes up for this deficit by offering superior sample rate playback and monitoring. There are many sound cards (even onboard solutions) that claim 192kHz playback, but many of them do a sample rate conversion usually to a far lower frequency and play the reduced fidelity frequency back. The 0202 natively plays 192kHz and lower frequencies with no conversion, which ensures high-fidelity audio with no down sampling.

As mentioned previously, the E-MU

0202 has one advantage over all other sound cards in that it can be used on any fairly new system with support for USB connections. Over and above that, however, E-MU has packaged the E-MU 0202 with some impressive software such as Cubase LE, Sonar LE, Wavelab Lite and Proteus FX, to name a few. All of these programs are full versions, meaning you don't need any software to get up and going. There is so much to the E-MU 0202 in terms of features that we could have dedicated this entire roundup to its internal components only. As far as audio quality is concerned, it's second only to the ESI Juli@ and just a little better than the Creative X-Fi XtremeGamer.



FEATURES

OUTPUT MODES

4 x 1/4-inch balanced jacks, Headphones

MULTI-CHANNEL MODES

2-channel Stereo+2-Channel Monitor via analogue outputs/inputs

GAMING FEATURES

DirectSound

PLAYBACK

22/44/48/96/176/192kHz (24-bit)

RECORDING

22/44/48/96/176/192kHz (24-bit)

DRIVER FORMATS

WDM, ASIO2.0

MIDI

None

TRUST SC-5250

Supplier → Pinnacle Micro | Website → www.pinnacle.co.za | RRP → R380

Trust isn't a name that comes to mind when one thinks about sound cards, but unbelievably, the company has been manufacturing sound cards for years. This is evident in the SC-5250, which is actually very good despite its small dimensions and unassuming packaging. It's by no means meant for audiophiles or hardcore gamers who want the latest EAX technology. It is suitable for those who spend much time watching DVDs and listening to other multi-channel audio formats.

The SC-5250 features a main board and a small daughter board (this is actually where all the value of this card lies). The daughter board only features digital connections, but unlike all other boards in this roundup, it has Optical and Coaxial output and input plugs. Since a normal RCA cable will do fine for transmitting a digital signal over the coaxial connector, Trust hasn't included that in the package, but the included Optical cable came as a pleasant surprise. This sound card, besides featuring

all the abovementioned digital connection methods, is actually capable of encoding and decoding a Dolby Digital (AC3) audio signal. This is perfect for the intended use of this sound card, because it negates the need for a receiver that can decode the signal and also allows one to up-mix stereo signals into a pseudo-surround mode. Where things don't go well is in the sampling modes for recording and playback. The SC-5250 can only play back 96kHz, 24-bit audio and record only up to 48kHz, 16-bit audio. While this isn't implicitly stated in the specs sheet, even the 96kHz playback rate is actually down-sampled to 48kHz at most and played back at this frequency robbing the sound of its fidelity. With that said, however, the SC-5250 does sound better than almost all onboard sound controllers available today, but it isn't for someone who would record or play back high-quality audio. The SC-5250 is worth the purchase if multi-channel audio is what you are into and you have the speakers to match it.



FEATURES

OUTPUT MODES

Output modes: Optical Out/Optical In/SPDIF Out/SPDIF In/Analogue Out (Stereo mini-jack)

MULTI-CHANNEL MODES

Dolby Digital 5.1 (AC3)

GAMING FEATURES

EAX, DirectSound3D

PLAYBACK

22/44/48/96kHz (24-bit, 192kHz SPDIF)

RECORDING

22/44/48kHz (16-bit only)

DRIVER FORMATS

Standard WDM driver

MIDI

MPU-401, 15-pin

CREATIVE SOUND BLASTER X-FI XTREMEGAMER

Supplier → Rectron | Website → www.rectron.co.za | RRP → R1,699

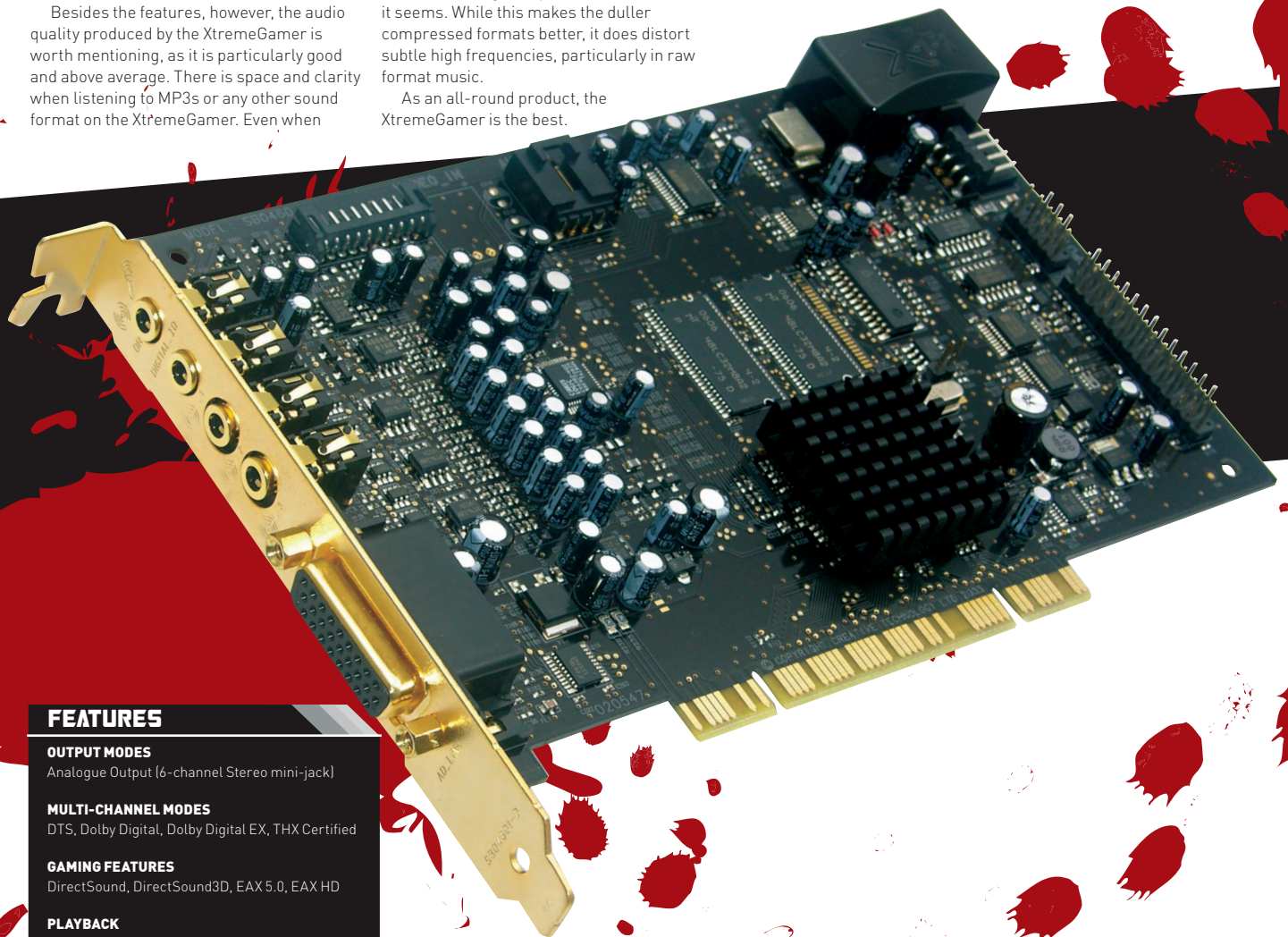
It must be said that if this were a roundup purely concerned with only the gaming aspect of sound cards, then the XtremeGamer would easily have won. There is something to be said not only about the audio quality of the board, but the features as well. No other sound card in this roundup can match the gaming features found on this sound card. Besides the mandatory Dolby Digital 5.1 support, the XtremeGamer also supports Dolby Digital EX, DTS, EAX 5.0 and EAX HD, and is THX certified. This sound card is proof of why Creative became so dominant in the discreet sound card market.

Besides the features, however, the audio quality produced by the XtremeGamer is worth mentioning, as it is particularly good and above average. There is space and clarity when listening to MP3s or any other sound format on the XtremeGamer. Even when

removing all the abovementioned features, the XtremeGamer would stand out as the sound card to have.

While the package that Creative provides is thin, it isn't a problem as such, because the magic is in the hardware. When we installed this sound card, it was obvious that it's one high-quality piece of hardware. In terms of audio clarity and pure naturalness of the produced signals, the XtremeGamer isn't able to match the Juli@, but does come close to the E-MU 0202, which is made for audio production. There is a slight boom in the bass and the high frequencies are boosted, it seems. While this makes the duller compressed formats better, it does distort subtle high frequencies, particularly in raw format music.

As an all-round product, the XtremeGamer is the best.



FEATURES

OUTPUT MODES

Analogue Output (6-channel Stereo mini-jack)

MULTI-CHANNEL MODES

DTS, Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX, THX Certified

GAMING FEATURES

DirectSound, DirectSound3D, EAX 5.0, EAX HD

PLAYBACK

22/44/48/96/192kHz (24-bit)

RECORDING

22/44/48/96/192kHz (24-bit)

DRIVER FORMATS

Standard WDM Driver, ASIO2.0

MIDI

None

CONCLUSION

In terms of features, it's a toss-up between the Creative XtremeGamer and the Barracuda, but factoring in the much superior sound of the X-Fi, it has to be the outright winner. As for audio quality, nothing here can match the ESI Juli@ 4x4. For anybody who is a purist about their audio, the Juli@ is the card to go for. However, should you be looking for a better-balanced solution in terms of gaming audio and the like, The XtremeGamer is what you may be looking for.



TEST DRIVE: TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

MOST FANS OF THE PC RACING GENRE WILL KNOW TWO FRANCHISES INTIMATELY. THE FIRST IS EA'S *NEED FOR SPEED*, AND *TEST DRIVE* IS THE SECOND. YET, *TEST DRIVE* HAS BEEN AROUND FOR QUITE A BIT LONGER THAN *NFS*. IN FACT, THE ORIGINAL *TEST DRIVE* IS RECOGNISED AS THE FIRST PC CAR-RACING GAME EVER DEVELOPED, MAKING ITS APPEARANCE ON DOS, ATARI AND THE COMMODORE 64 ALL THE WAY BACK IN 1987! THE DEVELOPERS OF THE ORIGINAL *NEED FOR SPEED*, IN FACT, HAD ALREADY BEEN INVOLVED IN THE CODING OF *THE DUEL: TEST DRIVE II* WHEN THIS POPULAR FRANCHISE KICKED OFF IN 1994. THIS MAKES *TEST DRIVE* A FULL TWO DECADES OLD THIS YEAR. MOREOVER, *TDU*, NOW AVAILABLE ON XBOX 360 AND PC, IS CERTAINLY A FITTING 20TH BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR FANS!



TEST DRIVE (1987)

The first version of this title featured some of the hottest super cars of the day – a trend we've come to expect of the title at this point – including the Ferrari Testarossa, the Porsche 911 Turbo and Lamborghini's archetypal super car, the Countach. It had a pretty basic premise: drive each of the cars along the same road against the clock, with the spoils being 'ownership' of the vehicle being piloted at the time.

Other traffic as well as the long arm of the law provided the moving chicanes necessary to make *Test Drive* a real challenge, not to mention the fact that the mountain pass you found yourself traversing had no guardrails to keep you on the blacktop!

Test Drive actually made it onto five platforms in total: DOS, the Commodore 64, the Atari ST, the Apple II and the Amiga. It was hailed as the first of the road-racing genre and praised for the quality of its graphics at the time.

THE DUEL: TEST DRIVE II (1989)

This second instalment introduced one additional challenge for the player to overcome: another AI-controlled super car battling it out for top honours at the finish line! It also featured more than just the one track included in the original game, and a full line-up of updated über-machines of the era including the legendary Ferrari F40 and the equally rare and phenomenal Porsche 959, among others.

It was in this version that the idea of adding more and more cars to a driving title like this was first born: in the end, *Test Drive II* had spawned no less than five add-on packs! Two featured more tracks and scenery, another two added extra cars to toy with, and the final 'Ultimate' *TD II* pack included all four as a single collection.

TEST DRIVE III: THE PASSION (1990)

Developers Accolade completely rebuilt what had become known as the definitive driving simulator with *TD III*, a game that only ever made it onto the DOS-based PC platform. In *TD III*, the map was open-ended and you could drive around where you pleased, to a limited extent. Moreover, this title also introduced a full 3D engine with triangles for hills and trees using the new, 256-colour VGA capabilities of modern systems of the early

90s. This allowed for a rich range of scenery to be introduced, and the developer even introduced a radio with selectable 'stations' for the sim-driver to choose from!

Interestingly, *TD III* featured only three cars, and of these, only the Lamborghini Diablo was ever more than a concept vehicle. The one add-on it spawned included two more and one additional track.

I remember well how difficult and unrealistic the control of the car was, but it didn't matter. There were astoundingly amusing touches like working windscreen wipers, and not only did you need these when the raindrops started falling, but birds would often poop on your screen in full daylight, necessitating a quick wipe for optimum visibility!

TEST DRIVE 4 (1997)

Then came the long drought. *TD4* eventually hit the shelves in 1997 for PC and PlayStation, with a flurry of titles to be released during the next three years, including the spin-off series, *Test Drive Off-Road*, the first instalment of which also appeared in '97. *TD4* was the first Windows incarnation of *Test Drive*, and returned to its roots of closed-circuit racing after the free-roam, angular world of *TD III*.

TD4, it has to be said, was pretty unmemorable, and, as I can recall, pretty darned bad. Although it had great graphics, it had a similar-feeling driving engine to what Accolade had provided seven years earlier in *TD III* – which was bad even then – and the *NFS* games had arrived to move the game on from this point! *TD*, it seemed, was as dead as fans expected it would be after the long hiatus.

TEST DRIVE 5 (1998)

That didn't stop *TD5*, and *TD Off-Road 2*, from being released in 1998, though. However, fans weren't buying it, with good reason, as these titles were barely reworked re-releases of the worst *TD* game developed to date, *TD4*. This incarnation did, however, introduce the multiplayer element for players with a TCP/IP network to mess around with, but the underlying game itself was such a poor effort that few really bothered.



TEST DRIVE 6 (2000)

Nevertheless, the rot didn't stop there. The *TD* franchise was used and abused during this period, spawning a host of sub-standard and deeply disappointing spin-offs in 1999, the one exception perhaps being a PS2, Dreamcast and PC game called *Le Mans 24 Hours*, which was both good to look at and reasonable entertaining to play. A third version of *TD Off-Road* was also released in '99, as well as a one-off called *Demolition Racer* and the shockingly bad *Test Drive 4x4*.

TD6 at least showed off the graphics of the otherwise useless *TD4/5* engine to good effect, as long as you had a powerful GPU installed! Nevertheless, looks alone couldn't save it, and it once more achieved little acclaim on any of the platforms it made it onto.

TEST DRIVE (2002)

Yes, by now things had come full circle. With this title, named simply after the original, the developers tried to add a new twist to the old formula with the introduction of a storyline.

It was nicely rendered and quite entertaining, although by no stretch of the imagination gripping. Still, I played through the entire game, as frustrating as the control and physics systems were, just to see all the storyline scenes – so the idea worked to an extent. It didn't really give diehard fans anything more to crow about, despite some superb graphics.

Meanwhile, the heavy fragmentation of the series continued, with confusing titles like *Need for Speed: V-Rally* (which never had anything to do with *NFS* and was actually a *TD*-franchised game) and *TD Eve of Destruction* appearing on consoles to limited success.

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED (2006)

At last, Eden and Atari have reversed a lot of this colourful history with the introduction of *TDU*. This is more like it. This is what *Test Drive* was always meant to become, but was consistently missed ever since *TD III* back in the early 90s. Read the full review for yourself, but suffice to say, *TDU* has managed to single-handedly reverse the damage and turn an ailing franchise into a worthy competitor for EA's seemingly yearly updates to the *NFS* series in the arcade-orientated sim-racing genre. **NAG**

Russell Bennett





BEST OF EUROPE CLASH AT EM/SEC DOUBLE-HEADER

HISTORICALLY, WHEN MAJOR GAMING organisations have scheduled events on conflicting dates, heads have rolled. It happened with the Electronic Sports World Cup and the Cyberathlete Professional League in 2005, and looks like happening again this year with the ESWC and the World Series of Video Games. Leaders from the opposing organisations have each typically accused their counterparts of treading on sacred turf, resulting in long and tiresome arguments conducted largely through the international media. Gaming communities have been split down loyalty lines, resulting in poorer attendance and lower standards overall.

However, for the first time in recent memory, two large organisations decided to pool their resources instead of fighting over territory. The Electronic Sports League's Extreme Masters (EM) tournament and the World Cyber Games' satellite main event – the Samsung European Championship (SEC) – were both held on the weekend of 16-18 March at the CeBIT expo in Hannover, Germany.

As the qualifiers for each event had taken place at about the same time, the competitive fields were virtually identical, both strewn with familiar names such as SK Gaming, Fnatic, Pentagram G-Shock, Grubby, ToD, HoT and Creolophus. The main supported games were (if you hadn't already guessed from the players) *Warcraft III* and *Counter-Strike 1.6*. This kind of dual participation was unprecedented in the world of e-sports, and promised to answer many longstanding questions about consistency and randomness in the most popular game types.

Counter-Strike 1.6 was, in the end, more predictable than many of its critics had been hoping to prove, and more random than its supporters had been praying for. That is, it was more-or-less what any neutral observer would have been expecting. SK Gaming, having narrowly ousted Fnatic at the Swedish qualifier, found the SEC finals a walk in the park and cruised through to their first major win since 2005. The only resistance came from WCG 2006 defending champions, Pentagram G-Shock (Poland), who put in a solid performance to finish second. In the EM finals, however, it was the Polish squad who brought home the gold, leaving SK Gaming floundering in fourth place behind H2K Gaming (Denmark) and Fnatic.

Warcraft III, on the other hand, was a model of consistency. The same two players, namely the Frenchman Yoan "ToD" Merlo and Ukraine's Mykhaylo



"HoT" Novopashyn, contested the finals of both events. Aside from the fact that both players have three-letter nicknames [and that both capitalise the final letter], their gaming styles couldn't be more starkly different. ToD generally plays conservative Human strategies, while HoT's Night Elf tactics are aggressive and unpredictable, often to the point of flat-out insanity.

In both events, ToD came into the grand final match from the lower bracket, meaning he would have to win two sets to secure victory, while HoT would only need one. ToD fought back strongly, taking the matches to the last map on both occasions. After the dust had settled, HoT stood tall on the SEC podium with a gold medal around his neck, while ToD held the same trophy for the Extreme Masters. It has been a topic of much debate as to which was the greater victory, but for ToD, who almost dropped out of the Extreme Masters after a shock first-round defeat to the inactive Orc player Bjorn "ElakeDuck" Odman (Sweden), it was probably not a difficult debate to settle.

The fan favourite and former champion, Manuel "Grubby" Schenkhuizen (Netherlands), never really got going in either tournament, finishing a lacklustre third in the Samsung European Championship, and a truly disappointing fifth/sixth in the Extreme Masters. His recent run of poor form began after the WC3L Season X finals in January, where he defeated South Korean Night Elf superstars Jae Ho "Moon" Jang and Sung Sik "Remind" Kim to help his team, Four Kings, to their fifth WC3L title. **NAG**

FINAL RESULTS

EXTREME MASTERS

Warcraft III

- 1 Yoan "ToD" Merlo (France)
- 2 Mykhaylo "HoT" Novopashyn (Ukraine)
- 3 Olav "Creolophus" Undheim (Norway)
- 4 Andrew "Fire_de" Regendantz (Germany)

Counter-Strike 1.6

- 1 Pentagram G-Shock (Poland)
- 2 H2K Gaming (Denmark)
- 3 Fnatic (Sweden)
- 4 SK Gaming (Sweden)

SAMSUNG EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Warcraft III

- 1 Mykhaylo "HoT" Novopashyn (Ukraine)
- 2 Yoan "ToD" Merlo (France)
- 3 Manuel "Grubby" Schenkhuizen (Netherlands)
- 4 Olav "Creolophus" Undheim (Norway)

Counter-Strike 1.6

- 1 SK Gaming (Sweden)
- 2 Pentagram G-Shock (Poland)
- 3 Meet Your Makers (Norway)
- 4 69°N-28°E (Finland)

SPONSORSHIP TURMOIL: LOCAL ESWC QUALIFIER SURVIVES

FOR A RATHER ANXIOUS two-week period, the fate of the most important local gaming event of the year was left up in the air. The Electronic Sports World Cup qualifier, which has been the most reliable means of winning a trip overseas since its inception in 2003, has traditionally been held at the Carousel Casino in April/May. However, in an announcement that has since received much praise for its honesty, Arena 77 owner Len Nery confirmed that the ESWC qualifier for 2007 would have to be cancelled due to financing problems.

"The reality," he said, "is that the cost of running a tournament of this scale is no less than R320,000. Our main sponsor was no longer able to support the ESWC event in South Africa and this has left a huge hole in our budget."

Reaction from the community came swiftly. "We were hyped up for the event and playing seriously good Quake," said Mark Fairbank, aka Lazarith, a leading contender for the *Quake 4* tournament, "but

after we heard about the cancellation, my practice partner and I both gave up playing PC games competitively. He even went as far as to delete the game from his hard drive." Indeed, the news caused significant damage to an already struggling scene, and pessimists predicted the end of competitive gaming in South Africa as we knew it.

Shortly afterwards, however, the bad news was softened by a second statement offering a ray of hope. The details were vague, but hinted at the possibility that the event would go ahead after all, and it was enough to convince players to wait for the final verdict. "Statements like that are not usually made without something big behind the scenes," said Chris Lautre, aka Apocalypse, from *Counter-Strike* team Damage Control. "We assumed that they would not instil false hope, and that Len was working on a major recovery."

That recovery was eventually revealed as a new title sponsor for the event: Emperors Palace in Boksburg. A clearly elated Mr Nery made the final announcement

on the 28th of March, giving details regarding the new location and dates. Emperors Palace will be taking the Carousel's place as the venue, and the event has been moved back to the 8th to 10th of June. "The dates are unfortunately not going to suite all of you," he said, "but it is either this or nothing at all. We will have the competitions take place on the Saturday and Sunday so as to minimise the time needed for those writing exams. However, we will open doors on Friday morning at 10 a.m." The supported game list has not officially been confirmed, but it is expected that the usual suspects – *Counter-Strike 1.6*, *Quake 4*, *Warcraft III* and *Trackmania Nations* – will feature.

This leaves only one problem for the aspiring champions: with the event being held so close to the international finals in France (5th to 8th of July), it will leave only a month for the winners to apply for travel visas. Arena 77 has advised anyone who believes they have a chance of winning to apply early. **NAG**

[www.arena77.com]



The argument over the best Power Ranger was getting ugly



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Developer→ EA Mythic | Distributor→ EA South Africa | Release→ Q4 2007

EA MYTHIC EARNED ITS pedigree from having developed *Dark Age of Camelot*, which is still regarded as one of the better MMORPGs out there, despite its age. Thanks to a deal with EA, Mythic is working on a *Warhammer* fantasy-based MMO where war is everything. *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning* (WAR) promises next-generation Realm vs. Realm gameplay geared towards the *Warhammer* theme of perpetual conflict between the various factions.

Players will have to determine their allegiance and join an Army once signed up. Good guys can fight for the Armies of Order, either as a stubborn Dwarf, prancy High Elf or a dedicated human soldier of the Empire. Evil provides the Armies of Destruction where you can be a savage Orc or Goblin, snide Dark Elf or a murdering human worshipper of Chaos. Realm vs. Realm combat takes place on three fronts and players begin their campaign fighting their specific ancestral enemy, but can swap to help allies at any time. The goal of RvR combat is to sack the enemy capital city. Achieving this requires an army to invade and take control of the opposition's homeland. Battles take place on objective-based

battlefields and instanced scenarios where point-based battles make use of NPC mercs known as Dogs of War.

Player vs. Player and Player vs. Environment combat take place on the same map, and both are geared towards the greater war in some way. Players aren't required to participate in PvP combat and may aid RvR or just stick to PvE [quests] entirely. All three benefit the overall Realm vs. Realm.

The *Warhammer* franchise has existed for over a quarter century and provides ample detailed source material for Mythic to work with - hopefully they'll be true to the Games Workshop property. Some of the more interesting elements of WAR include how your character will change in relation to your physical power. Orcs grow in size, Dwarf's bears get longer and so forth. The guild you are in will be visually represented on your character, making your characters rather unique. WAR will require a monthly subscription fee, but the price hasn't been decided on yet. Quests will apparently branch out depending on your choice, while incidental PvP on the RvR battlefield should keep things immediate and interesting. **NAG**

WARHAMMER HISTORY

Originally known as *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* and often abbreviated as *Warhammer*, *Warhammer: The Game of Fantasy Battles* is a tabletop war-game by Games Workshop. You buy and assemble 'regiments' of fantasy miniatures, which often come unpainted (painted ones costs a lot more, and generally they are unpainted so you can paint them in your own colours with your own symbols). The stock fantasy races are Humans, Elves, Dwarfs, Undead, Orcs as well as some unusual ones such as Lizardmen and Skaven. Each race has its own strengths and flaws set out in the rulebooks. Elves have some of the most powerful archers and such, but poor overall defence.

Since first appearing in 1983, *Warhammer* has been updated as often as *Dungeons and Dragons*. It is currently on its official seventh edition.

In 1986, Games Workshop released the *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, which is a role-playing system set in the *Warhammer* Fantasy universe. The first edition is fondly remembered for having had dark and gruesome humour during a period when fantasy was universally overly serious.

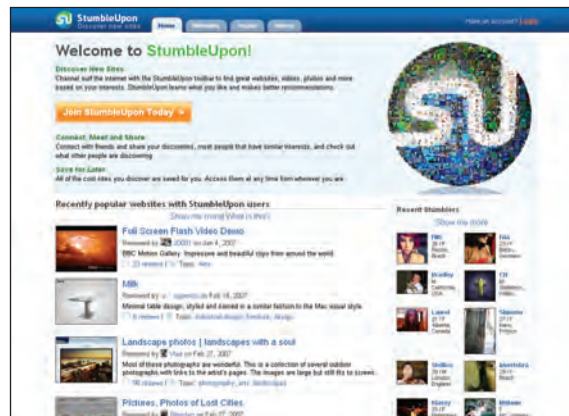
WOCKING WEBSITES 2: THE LINKAGE

Every day the Internet expands by almost double, sometimes triple¹. How can a person possibly browse all that Internet? You can't². Fear not, that is why South Africa's Best Gaming Magazine³ is here to tell you what to browse, because we harvest only the freshest and most important links from the vast fields of Internet crops.



www.n4g.com

It's almost as if NAG and N4G are twins, separated at birth! The truth is though, we have nothing to do with N4G, and while their logo does look very familiar, trust us, we're still going to be suing their asses for totally ripping us off. Until then, you should probably read NAG because it's a damn good site for the latest gaming news [that's why it's called News 4 Gamers]. It's a lot like Digg: people submit content to it and some super-science sorts it all so you only get the hottest stuff. "The temperature is decided by an algorithm, which looks at the combined attention a story gets and the nature of this attention over different time periods," according to the Website. That's some seriously smart stuff there. Perhaps we shouldn't be suing these people.



www.stumbleupon.com

It happens to everyone: you're sitting there one night on the Intarwabs and you just don't know what to browse for. You're not in the mood to go looking, but you don't want to be bored either. StumbleUpon harnesses the power of a million trained monkeys and provides you with interesting things in only a single click. Once you install the toolbar for your browser, you have a 'Stumble' button, Click that, and a Website comes your way and you can either Thumbs Up it or give it a Thumbs Down. By giving it a Thumbs Down, you're telling the Computer that you don't like sites like this, and it will try to be all smart and understand what you like and don't like. Giving a Website a Thumbs Up tells the Computer you dig it, and want more stuff like this. So, the more you use it, the better it gets! You can join specific StumbleGroups if you know what you like, like gaming or soccer. You can also easily send the link of a page you have just stumbled upon to a friend if you want to share, by using the toolbar.



www.thegameconsole.com

If you're bored and don't want to try StumbleUpon, you could always educate yourself the old-fashioned way: reading. In this case, if you want to get an education in the history of consoles, then look no further than www.thegameconsole.com. It lists, no lie, every console ever made as well as photos and information for each one. Find out about the early 1970s and the Magnavox Odyssey, learn about the Atari days of the '80s and refresh your memory about the Genesis, 3DO and other consoles of the '90s. You'll be able to impress all your friends and perhaps even get a job at NAG one day.



www.fark.com

We're not sure why we've not mentioned this one before, but any Website that started life as a URL that showed a picture of a squirrel with large nuts deserves praise. Drew Curtis created the Website back in 1999 to share what he considered interesting news with friends, but eventually the Website added link submissions and forums, and the Website grew. Now, it's the best place to check for pertinent but totally not boring news. If you know Something Awful, it's a bit like that but with much less stupidity and more actual news that people should probably know.

www.askananinja.com

You got questions, ninjas got answers. If you've never seen ninjas answer questions, you're in for a treat. Every week, people e-mail in questions that are then answered by a funny ninja who looks forward to killing you. Our personal favourite is the Ninja Omnibus, episodes in which the ninja tries to answer as many questions as possible. Careful, the theme song is catchy and you might find yourself humming it for no reason before being killed by a ninja out to prove a point about people who hum in public.



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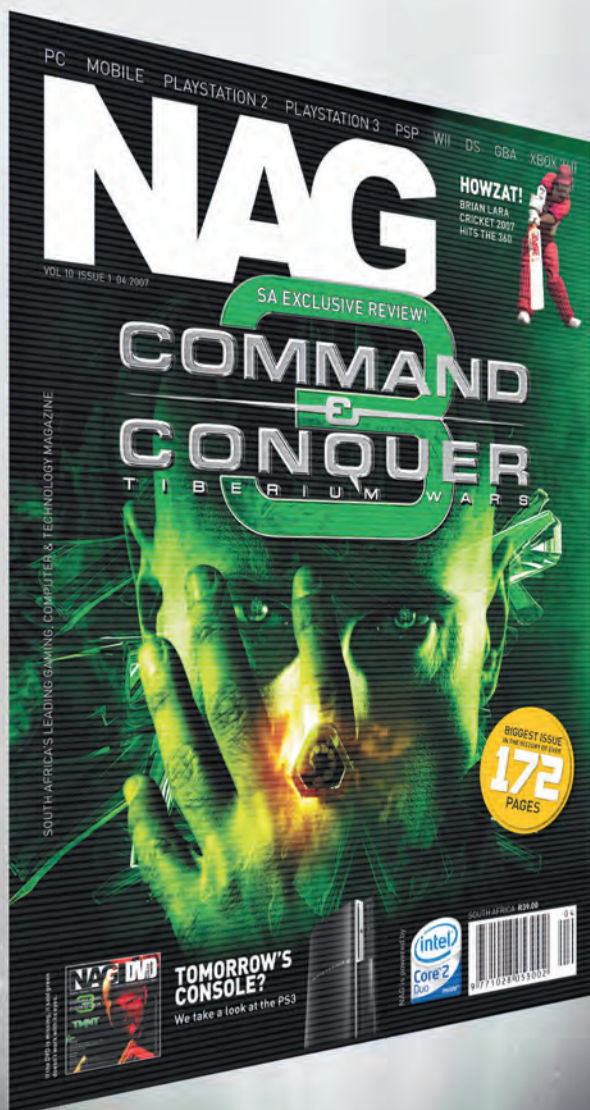
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APPROACHING FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE...

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A GAME AND EVENTUALLY TURNING YOURSELF INTO A GOOD GAME DESIGNER/DEVELOPER CAN BE LONG AND ARDUOUS. ONE OF THE BETTER TRICKS TO HAVE IN YOUR REPERTOIRE IS THE ABILITY TO 'TAKE APART' WHAT OTHER GAMES ARE DOING AND THUS UNDERSTAND THE VARIOUS TECHNIQUES AND ALGORITHMS SO THAT YOU CAN USE THEM YOURSELF. THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THINGS AT A CODE LEVEL. ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS LEARN TO LOOK AT GAMES A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY...

HEY, THAT LOOKED COOL!

THE FIRST PART OF figuring out other people's tricks is simply noticing them. Next time you see something that makes you exclaim aloud in a new game, take note of what it was. It could be the latest and greatest visual effect that's splashed all over the marketing hype for a blockbuster game, or it could be something simple yet stylish that goes otherwise unnoticed compared to flashier effects.

The goal is to become aware of the effort that has gone into sculpting everything you see or hear while you're playing a game. Even the smallest onscreen effects have had hours and hours poured into them. By training yourself to notice the things that make a difference to you while you're playing a game, you'll start being able to add them to your next project when you notice that there's something indefinable missing on your 14th play-through.

I SEE WHAT YOU DID THERE...

Only once you've identified an effect or trick as something useful that you actually want to duplicate should you spend some time really going over it in the games where it appears. Sure, figuring out how a game does something can be a fun thought experiment, but unless you get really good at it and can start naming techniques and implementations from memory, it's probably better to spend the time recreating the effect when you really need it.

An effect can be almost anything: you could isolate the way that *Warcraft III* uses 'streamers' (particles with length that follow trails) for things like rejuvenation or the ziggurat's attack; or you could become fascinated with how FPS games project their flashlights (the key here is to isolate the effect you're after and spend time examining it). See where it breaks down, see where it works perfectly, and try to spot any patterns that might give you clues on how to build that effect yourself.

The next step is to take stock of the tools you have available to rebuild that effect. Take a good look at your preferred programming system and the engine you're using and make a list of the features that you think will help you recreate a similar visual effect/style in your own game... It's important that you only start adding effects to an existing game, otherwise you might get stuck trying to develop a game around an ever-growing stack of special effects and nifty-looking scenes that just don't work as an approach to game design.

Hit Google and read up on the various implementations of what you would like to do. Chances are that you'll only find more modern and GPU-heavy tricks online, but



You'll very rarely get a 'single-pass' trick that only needs one step to work perfectly. It doesn't matter if your logical steps are different to the implementation of the particular trick in another system: you're trying to create the effect for your game, not theirs!

SOME LITTLE-KNOWN TRICKS AND EFFECTS

The best way to illustrate this different way of looking at games that we're talking about here is to give examples of it in action. Therefore, we'll go over a couple of effects that we noticed and which got stuck in our heads due their sheer smartness:

CAMERA COUNTER-MOVEMENT IN FIGHTING GAMES

Fighting games tend to rely on fast motion and a sense of impact to really emphasise the action onscreen. However, they have a small problem in that they have to focus very closely on two main characters onscreen at the same time. Typically both speed and the consequences of hits have been portrayed via animation: a move that's too fast to have many intervening frames

it can't hurt to go looking. Then sit down and logically recreate the steps behind your effect in your system. For instance, something as 'simple' as reflections in a 2D game actually have at least three steps: getting a picture of the environment that is going to be reflected; distorting that picture so that it looks like it's actually being reflected by your object; and drawing the reflection correctly using alpha blending.

QUESTION BOX:

An exceedingly popular question recently has been: "Can I make my XNA project compile to both Windows and my 360 without having to have two separate projects?" or at least similar words to the same effect.

The short answer is a qualified yes. With a little bit of hacking you can modify your project files to give you build targets for each XNA platform (much like you have Debug and Retail builds that you can select between at the moment). Unfortunately, this isn't yet fully supported by the IDE, so there are a few issues that could cause problems for you:

The properties window (prior to the GSE update) doesn't automatically refresh when you switch targets, so you have to do it manually by hitting F5 in the window;

Some references may be confused if you spend a lot of time developing in both, so be careful and always check where code was trying to execute when examining a crash; and

Don't use windows forms or try to edit content in a windows form when switching platforms - you could lose data or even corrupt your project!

With those caveats in mind, all you need to do to have projects that can compile to both Windows and Xbox 360 is to go to the Game.Dev section of the DVD, extract the contents of Dual_Platform_XNA.zip and follow the instructions in the readme.txt to have a dual-platform project in no time...

Unfortunately, you'll have to re-import any classes and resources you may already be working with into your new project, but that's a small price to pay for flexibility.

has a motion trail, something they picked up from anime, letting us and our slow eyes pick out the path that the move must have followed. Animation to convey impact usually involves displaying hit animations, and these days particle effects at the point of impact.

The *Soul Calibur* series of fighting games from Namco does something rather interesting to accentuate character motion and the sense of huge forces being employed by the players: it plays with the camera position. Specifically, it moves the camera almost imperceptibly in the opposite direction as a move is set up, so slowly that we hardly notice, then as the move happens, the camera snaps along the opposite path of the move to accentuate its speed. A high to low move will see the camera slowly moving down at first, then rapidly upwards during the move itself and slowly back to the centre of the screen again once the move completes. This generates a sense of momentum for bigger moves that move at exactly the same speed as 'less impactful' ones, but now appear to be much nastier thanks to the camera counter-movement. *Soul Calibur* also uses particles with momentum to accentuate contacts and give players more indication of where they were hit from; making the game much meatier than it would have been without all these tricks.

VECTORBALLS

A vectorball is a billboard or sprite that looks like a sphere,

which is then drawn in locations where a real sphere constructed out of geometry would be far too costly. Vectorballs are an ancient technique from back when 3D was all done in software. However, they can still be useful today in specific situations.

Vectorballs supply detail in *Warcraft III* (the blademaster's necklace, troll witch-doctor potions, etc.) to name just one of the recent games that use them. The easiest way to spot vectorballs is by the way they never rotate. Because they're sprites, they always face the camera at the same angle. That said, they're still an excellent way of including much more graphical detail in a model where perfect roundness is just going to cost far too many polygons...

A SERIES OF TRICKS

The different viewpoint we're presenting is that games can be seen as a sequence of tricks and techniques, each assembled one after the other to provide the right feeling of gameplay. Collision detection becomes a technique, added to input, added to a terrain trick (a heightmap or BSP tree), added to various graphical effects, etc.

From this angle, games look more like recipes. Developing your own game becomes a matter of understanding what tricks you can employ to create the desired atmosphere and game 'flavour' that you're after. There's nothing like sampling other games to understand what recipes are out there for you to use... **NAG**



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MOVIES

AT THE CINEMA: HOT FUZZ

BIG COPS. SMALL TOWN. Moderate Violence. From the team that brought you *Spaced* and *Shaun of the Dead* comes *Hot Fuzz*, a story about a big city cop who is sent to a small British town because he is simply too good and making the other cops look bad. When he gets there, he finds a quiet, peaceful town with little crime. In fact, too little crime and he starts to suspect there's more going on. This will be the first time in a while that Simon Pegg (Shaun in *SOTD*), who co-

wrote this with Edgar Wright, played a stronger role than the loser characters of *SOTD* and *Spaced*, but Nick Frost is back doing his familiar buffoonish role. It hasn't been getting the same great reviews *SOTD* did, but that zombie movie was a particular classic. Still, *Hot Fuzz* looks like it will be hilarious, plus we could all do with that alternative dose of humour this duo brings to the horror genre. C'mon, you loved *Shaun of the Dead*. We know you want to watch *Hot Fuzz*.



Lucky Number Slevin

Cast: Hartnett, Bruce Willis, Lucy Liu, Morgan Freeman, Ben Kingsley
Director: Paul McGuigan
Genre: Crime Comedy
Rating: 16 LSV

After losing his job and finding his girlfriend cheating on him, a guy heads to his friend's place in New York. However, as he arrives in NYC, two thugs knock on the door, confusing him for his friend, and he is dragged off to a crime kingpin. He ends up having to settle his friend's gambling debt by killing another kingpin's son. As he gets back from the first meeting, the second kingpin also summons him, also mistaking him for his friend and also expecting a debt to be settled. Fortunately for him, he suffers from a rare condition that makes him pretty easy-going about it all.

The movie: The plot above explains the premise of the movie, but there is a lot more going on here. So much, in fact, that it risks giving the real story away at several points. Basically, *Lucky Number Slevin* isn't as clever at telling its story and you might figure it out before the movie reveals itself. Nevertheless, that doesn't matter too much, because it's a lot of fun to watch. A black comedy with an edge to it, it won't really have you guessing much, but you'll enjoy the ride.

The DVD: Includes deleted scenes.



COMICS

Written by Clive Burmeister

Zombie

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel MAX
Writer: Mike Raicht
Artist: Kyle Hotz
Price: R124.95

Aaaargh, Zombies! This is a gory little story about a chemical spill that causes anyone who encounters the substance to change into a mindless zombie-like creature that craves living flesh to sustain itself. But the main characters seem more caught up in their own troubles than worrying about the hordes of man-eating monsters around them. I mean, what's the point in surviving an army of the undead if you don't have a bag of money to show for it? None, really!



Hellsing Vol 1

Format: Manga Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse
Created by: Kohta Hirano
Price: R119.95

Hellsing is arguably one of the most popular anime titles out there, and this first installment, collected in Manga graphic format from Dark Horse comics, is true to the original. A great and entertaining story of a special secret service organisation that deals with dark forces, like ghouls and vampires. Great characters, nice story, appealing artwork - there's a reason why it's famous.



The Road to Guantanamo

Cast: Riz Ahmed, Farhad Harun, Waqar Siddiqui, Afran Usman, Jason Salkey

Director: Michael Winterbottom & Mat Whitecross

Genre: Documentary Drama

Rating: 10

This docu-drama tells the story of the Tipton Three, three Pakistani Britons who, through a series of events, end up for three years at the US military's Guantanamo Bay base without charge or trial. During this time, Ruhul Ahmed, Asif Iqbal and Shafiq Rasul were subjected to extreme conditions and interrogation, including torture, to obtain false confessions for crimes they never committed. Filmed in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, it tells their story in a very personal way and questions what the US does with its detainees at the infamous 'Gitmo' prison.

The Movie: *The Road to Guantanamo* is quite an intense watch. The story is narrated by the Tipton three as they recount their journey to Pakistan and Afghanistan, how they ended up being captured as suspected Taliban fighters, how they lost their friend Monir during the bombings and how the US military unlawfully detained them at the base. Because the whole affair is still very secretive, cult director Micheal Winterbottom made a film with actors to recount the story. These pieces are impressive and atmospheric, so you never feel like you are watching a dry documentary. However, it never feels like fiction either. Well worth watching.

The DVD: No special features.



Fragile: A Ghost Story (aka Frágiles)

Cast: Calista Flockhart, Richard Roxburgh, Gemma Jones, Colin McFarlane, Daniel Ortiz

Director: Jaume Balagueró

Genre: Horror

Rating: 13 LV

A nurse takes over at a hospital in the middle of closing down. Here she keeps an eye on the remaining child patients until they can be moved to a new hospital. However, something is definitely not right and the children talk about a mechanical girl who visits them. Soon, though, horrific 'accidents' start happening and chilling encounters with the ghost convinces the nurse that something is definitely wrong.

The movie: After *Ally McBeal*, we haven't seen a lot of Calista Flockhart, but she returns here in a rather humble movie off the beaten track of Hollywood. With her strong acting and the director's previous experience with horrors, *Fragile* is actually a bit of a gem. Not a great, gleaming gem and it would need more than a good buff to make it shine, but *Fragile* features strong characters, interesting and moody setups, not to mention a ghost that isn't happy simply making things happen late in the movie. It's not great, but pretty good and well paced.

The DVD: No special features.



Taladega Nights (aka Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby)

Cast: Will Ferrell, Adam McKay, Sacha Brian Cohen, Gary Cole, Jane Lynch, John C. Reilly

Director: Adam McKay

Genre: Sports Comedy

Rating: 10 L

The only thing Ricky Bobby ever learned from his dad was, "If you ain't first, you're last!" Therefore, applying that as his life philosophy, Bobby suddenly gets the chance to become a NASCAR driver, which he turns out to be really good at. However, as he reaches the peak of his success, his team boss starts a new team featuring top Formula One driver Jean Girard. During a race, Bobby is involved in an accident and has to recover. Will he ever recover and "Be first"?

The Movie: Will Ferrell is showing his great comedy form with this utter spoof of everything NASCAR, including a very gay Jean Girard, played by Sacha Brian Cohen, and some friendship moments between Bobby and Cal, played by John C. Reilly, that could only be compared to Spongebob and Patrick. A few people who have seen this didn't like it, though why really escape us. It's pretty much non-stop humour from start to finish, and if you like the borderline inane wit that Ferrell loves to use, you'll probably consider this his best movie yet. We sure do.

The DVD: Deleted scenes, bloopers, commentary, dummies and outtakes.



Michael Turner's Fathom: Kiani #1

Format: Comic Series

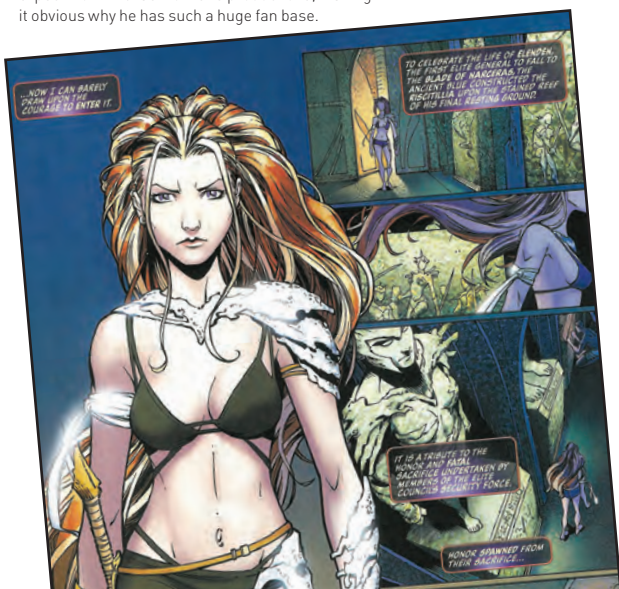
Publisher: Aspen

Writer: Vince Hernandez

Artist: Marcus To

Price: R27.95

This series picks up the ongoing *Fathom* saga after the death of Brande, and follows Kiani and how she deals with that tragedy and her new growing powers. If you haven't been following *Fathom*, you may be a little in the dark on this one, but being only a first issue, more background will probably be covered later on. The artwork is what we've come to expect from Michael Turner's productions, making it obvious why he has such a huge fan base.



The Walking Dead Vol 1 Days Gone Bye

Format: Graphic Novel

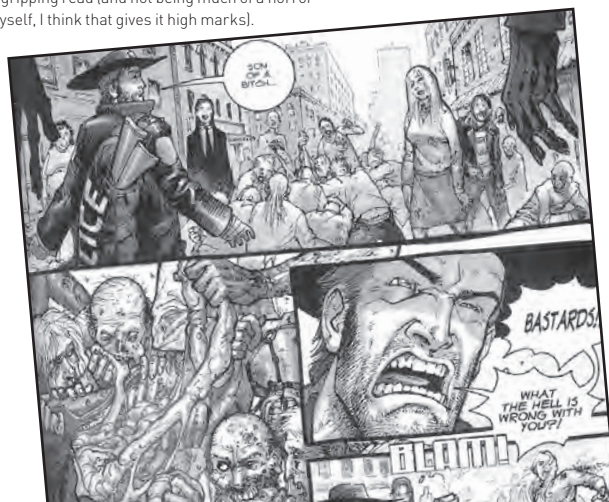
Publisher: Image

Writer: Robert Kirkman

Artist: Tony Moore

Price: R89.95

At first glance I thought, "ah, yet another zombie comic", but reading *The Walking Dead* is much more than looking at just the horror gore-fest that lots of zombie comics end up being. This story focuses on character development, and how these characters react in certain situations. Sure, there are still horror elements, and the appealing artwork by Moore can be plain grisly at times, but rather than leaving it at that, Kirkman's writing brings it to a new level. And what's more, the story doesn't leave you hanging at the best time, it carries on and on. I found this a gripping read (and not being much of a horror fan myself, I think that gives it high marks).



RAVEN'S LOFT

BACK TO THE FUTURE

AT THE TIME OF writing this, the previews for Future Sight, the third and final set in the Time Spiral block had begun. Therefore, by the time you read this, most of this will be old hat for some of you. Nevertheless, let us take a quick peek into what our *Magic: The Gathering* future holds...

Those of you who read this column regularly will be aware that I've been less than enamoured by the second set in this block, Planar Chaos. For those of you who missed those rants and complaints, my main objection is about the fact that the colour pie has been muddled and the five colours of *Magic* have lost much of their identities by dint of their identity-defining characteristics being shuffled around. Therefore, it was with considerable anticipation and apprehension that I awaited the arrival of Future Sight. Given the block's overall past-present-future theme, the closing expansion is set to represent the intended future of the game as a whole. My hope has been that the 'traditional' colour pie would be restored. Well, it looks like this hope is to be fulfilled. Hooray!

However, the future may not be all rosy. Perhaps I am being alarmist, but finding that two of the four cards previewed so far are creatures with 'flash', I am concerned that instant-speed creature summoning may end up dominating. Surely, that undermines a fundamental of the game: the fact that creatures are recruited at sorcery speed. I find it disturbing that whereas 'flash' used to be a fairly unusual (i.e. the exception to the rule) and consequently powerful ability, it may now become the rule rather than the exception. After all, why play creatures in your own turn when you can wait till a tactically better time? Once again, I find myself unable to escape the feeling that Wizards of the Coast is gunning for blue. Well, Wizards, if you are going to constantly make it harder for blue to deal with its opponents, why not at least reprint Counterspell, huh?

An outright gripe on my part is about the card frames for the 'timeshifted' (from the future!) cards in this set. These frames, as you can see, look more like they belong in

some sort of sci-fi themed game. As if that were not bad enough, the mana costs have been shifted to the left! What is up with that? At first, it was merely the aesthetics of this that annoyed me, until a fellow player pointed out to me that now he must find some different way to hold his hand! Furthermore, having to expose the left-hand side of a card to oneself in order to check its casting cost means that the opponent has a clue – he or she now knows that you are looking at a Future Sight timeshifted card!

Alright, enough complaining – now for the cool stuff. The new set incorporates some fifty-odd mechanics, which may seem excessive. However, I have a theory on what is happening here: I believe Wizards of the Coast is basically polling its player base on what mechanics are wanted. (This does suggest to me that the company is at a bit of a loss in the ideas department; a notion reinforced by the fact that there are all sorts of willy-nilly randomness being exercised, apparently purely for its own sake – such as the deviant card frames!) Some mechanics will appear as one-offs, including transfigure, which is illustrated here. This is an interesting variation on the transmute mechanic, and I believe is perfectly positioned in black, the colour of tutoring: you make a sacrifice in order to get exactly what you want!

The featured blue creature is also intriguing and perfectly allocated, colour pie wise. It has flash (which many consider should be the province of blue, the "playing in other players' turns" colour, and green, the "anti-blue, creature-based" colour), and serves bouncing and partial countering functions. Interestingly enough, the 'bounce a spell' ability allows the blue player to temporarily get around uncounterable spells – about time!

The white card illustrated here I am ambivalent about. Make no mistake, I think it's a very powerful card – perhaps a bit too powerful, actually. Four mana for a 3/3 with flash is good to begin with, before the protection-granting ability. Nevertheless, probably not broken *per se*.

However, then we look at the last preview

card, and things go rather pear-shaped. An aura that enchants an instant in a graveyard? This may be a little too 'out there' for some. Here, I believe, is another case of "different for the sake of being different" or "can't think of anything better." Nevertheless, I guess time will tell. Next month, I'll have played the new set and will be able to give a fuller, more holistic critique. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin



SCRYING THE SYNERGIES

The preponderance of flash creatures opens interesting possibilities. Two Planar Chaos white creatures, Whitemane Lion and Stonecloaker, have the ability to 'rescue' a creature – play it out, return it or another of your creatures to your hand. This combines well with creatures with 'comes-into-play' abilities in general, and particularly well with flash creatures with comes-into-play abilities. So, how about Whitemane Lion or Stonecloaker with Seht's Tiger or Venser, Shaper Savant...?



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KRATOS SPEAKS

OF COURSE WE LISTEN.
WHAT ARE WE, STUPID?

ÜBER EDITOR

Games! Damn, we're here for the Games! How hardcore are you really? Are you really hardcore? Are you really, really hardcore? I don't think you are. You are a wimp. You suck. You are not hardcore. What are you doing with a copy of Übergamer? You suck. Give me back that magazine. You are not hardcore enough for Übergamer! Shut up. Go away. You suck.

And while you sit there in all of your pitiful sucking, remember how hardcore we are and that we define the core in hard and the hard in core. Yeah, that's how hardcore Übergamer is. If you don't get that, why the hell are you reading this? Give me back that magazine. You suck.

Yeah, this is a milestone. Super hardcore. You don't get harder to the core than Übergamer hardcore. You know why? Because we're hardcore! You're not! You suck! See? I'm all over your ass again and you didn't see it happen. That's how hardcore I am. That's why I run this magazine and you don't. Because I'm hardcore. And you suck. Give me back that magazine.

Sense a trend here? You should, you gutless excuse of a gamer. You are not hardcore. We are. How many times do I have to explain this to you? Don't you get it? That's because you suck! Ha! Ha! Got you again!

Man, there's all kind of stupid hardcore stuff in this issue, stuff so hardcore I don't even know what it is. I'm so hardcore, I don't even need to be here. None of Übergamer's staff actually work on the mag. We're too hardcore for that. The silly stuff, like writing and showing up for work, is left to the hamsters. Yeah, we have hamsters - lots of them. And they are hardcore hamsters. Your hamsters are not hardcore. So you and your hamsters suck. Hurts, doesn't it?

Man, if you ever produce a magazine, you know what I'll do. I'll put it in our hamster cages. Because they are hardcore and you are not. Know what they are going to do with your mag pages? Here's a hint: it's pretty hardcore.

But if you are really hardcore, you deserve Übergamer. You need Übergamer. You lust Übergamer. Of course, if you were REALLY hardcore, you wouldn't be reading a magazine. Sissy. You suck!

Torrent "Hardcore" Catscan
Übergamer Editor

ÜBER NEWS



POLITICIANS ATTACK POOR RUSSIAN IN GTA IV

Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto* series can't seem to avoid controversy. Even though the latest iteration of the game is still far from release, a recently released trailer giving a sneak peek into the world of *GTA IV* has already stirred negative reactions. Politicians and civil groups have reacted swiftly to condemn the game's portrayal of Russian.

"The dialogue in the trailer was clearly not supplied by a Russian, but someone pretending to be one." This stern indictment came from PureGam, a gamer advocate group, in a press release. It continued to accuse Rockstar of "preferring to use cut-rate methods to produce the game instead of representing the authenticity the next-generation audience has come to expect." The voluptuous Louise Suttle from the Language Accuracy Network of Conscious Citizens (LANCC), echoed the sentiments, saying, "What's easier? Hire a real Russian or pull some guy off the street who knows Boris Karlov jokes?" However, the problem doesn't stop there. Some see the incident as

offending the very fabric of New York City, a metropolis that celebrates its melting-pot reputation. In a stern tone, local Democrat Errol Mortimer's spokesperson, Larry Sierra, condemned the game's portrayal as, "Shallow and completely misleading."

"The office of Mr Sierra strongly opposes any game that seeks to muddy the heritage and current culture of this beautiful city. It is a well-known fact that many true Russians call New York home, none of them engaging with a fake Russian accent. We will definitely not support any entertainment that cheapens the role of accents in society and awards points for poor dialogue."

Ms Suttle, while passing the cookies, was more concerned with accuracy: "Would subtitles hurt? You almost have to wonder why *GTA* and other games don't make players read. Did you know that you have to read in all Japanese games? That's why they are smarter than us."

Rockstar, when asked for comment, only issued this statement: "In Russia, violent game sues moral watchdogs!" **U**

WOW PLAYER SCORNE AT CYBER CAFÉ

When gamer Kevin "Hand of Dom [sic]" Morris (14) recently arrived at a local cyber café for a few hours of Blizzard's MMORPG, *World of Warcraft*, he swiftly found himself a target of ridicule.

"There was a contingent of bigger boys already there," his mother, Mrs Harriet Morris (54), told Übergamer. "I believe they were playing something called *Guild Wars*. And they called my Kevvie all sorts of nasty names like 'Low-poly, flop-eared seamstress'. Kevvie has told me that, as a tailor, he is an invaluable asset to his

Night Elf companions. I've no idea what he's talking about, but it certainly does sound very important." A tearful Kevin added, "I'm almost Level 36."

Café manager Griff Steerpike says that this sort of inter-metaversal rivalry isn't uncommon in his establishment. "Last week I had to break up a scuffle between *Ryzom* and *Second Life* players over whose integrated item creation function was superior. Still, when those Guild thugs started picking on Kevin, I loled. C'mon, who plays a tailor anyway?" **U**




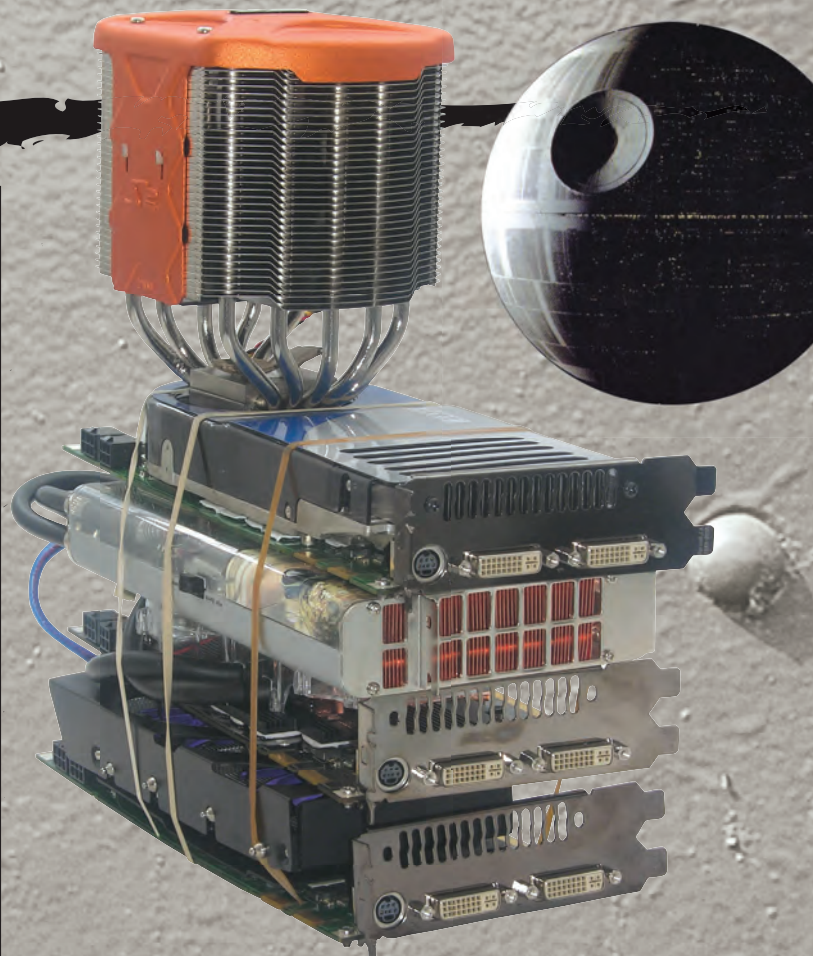
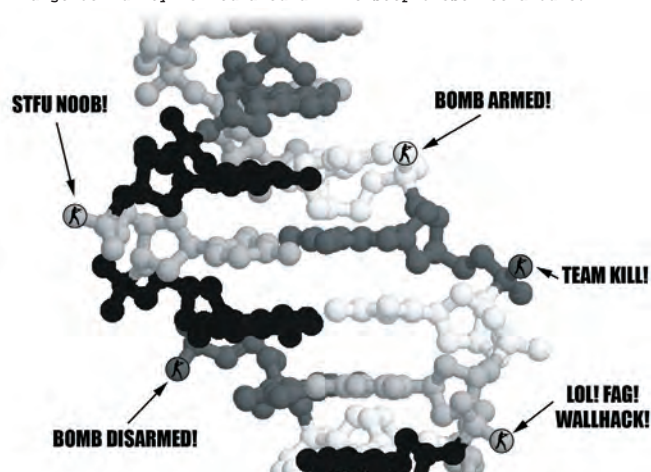
COUNTER-STRIKE GENE DISCOVERED

After years of government-funded research, the Human Genome Project has managed to isolate and capture a specific recessive gene they believe is responsible for the overwhelming popularity of the online hostage simulator, *Counter-Strike*. Back in 1862, Jess Cliff apparently tripped over his two-year-old daughter, smashing his head on his computer keyboard. The end result was that his spreadsheet and prayer program compiled something very different that also happened to work as a mod for *Half-Life*, a game most people have played but don't really think about because the graphics are totally ass compared to *Half-Life 2*. Cliff quickly noticed just how satisfying *Counter-Strike* could be and quickly started distributing it via various Christian youth-group Websites. Soon, a large community formed around

Counter-Strike and the rest will eventually be taught in school alongside other dark periods in humanity's history.

While working late one night, renowned geneticist and project leader at the Human Genome Project Prokary Otes noticed a strange segment of nucleic acid markers. "Most genes contain non-coding regions that do not code for the gene products, but regulate gene expressions," he went on to say over coffee. "The genes of eukaryotic organisms, such as *Counter-Strike* enthusiasts, can contain non-coding regions called introns that are removed from the messenger RNA in a process known as archaea base-pairing." He hopes this recent discovery will help create additional funding, which may lead to identifying the *DotA* gene megabase.

Sadly, identifying the genetic markers brings science no step closer to a cure. 



IT GOES UP TO DX11

An independent developer has spoken candidly about DirectX 11, the potential successor to DirectX 10 (DX10). DX10 is the newly released and much-hailed arrival to Microsoft's graphic arsenal, exclusive to the Vista operating system. But while current gamers and many developers are still starting to embrace the new standard, Fickle Thumb Games is already looking further ahead.

"We can't stay at the top of the game if we don't always look ahead," explained John Dyer, FTG CEO. "The excitement around DX10 is justified, because the new technology will change gaming forever. But that means we have to look even further ahead." Dyer is talking about FTG joining a rumoured DX11 group of developers, their task being to come to grips with the new technology before it is released to the mass market.

"I think Microsoft realises that releasing DX10 and then making everyone wait months and months for a proper DX10 game wasn't smart," said Simon Clarke, an analyst at Fenn & Bender Consultants. "This would certainly address that problem." But the software giant has remained silent on the subject, not commenting on the existence of any DX11 developer group.


As a member of the rumoured group, FTG says it is privy to some of the massive changes DX11

will bring to PC games. According to Sandra Johnston, FTG's lead engineer, DX11 works for the gamer.

"I think what will really surprise people is how Microsoft is thinking out of the box. Firstly, DX11 will be 100% compatible with all PC game platforms ever. So there will be no need for third-party fixes like DOSBox or ScummVM. The software will also be able to discover your LCD's native res and automatically turn the game to match for maximum enjoyment." Another revolutionary feature mentioned is AI that will take over the game if a multiplayer opponent is disconnected and hand control back when they reconnect.

"Some games already have done that, but this will make it a standard," said Johnston. "Hopefully it will also bring other standards, such as blocking IM windows from opening during a game."

Even without any official response from Microsoft on the existence of an eleventh DirectX, another iteration will enjoy the support of its partners. According to an anonymous source at a graphics chipset manufacturer, they are always looking forward to the next DX.

"Of course we'll support it. How else will we be able to justify the price of our upcoming Super Bastard Octa-Core?" 

ÜBER NEWS

SHOCKING REVELATION FROM UT DEVELOPER

Bowing to strong socio-political pressure, Unreal Tournament developer Epic Games has announced that its upcoming title, UT3, will not feature weapons, but will instead focus on "strategic mediated conflict resolution." Epic founder Tim Sweeney revealed at a press conference that, "After much consideration, we simply felt that to be truly next-gen, we should look to peaceful alternatives to the relentless and essentially rather unreasonable violence of previous titles."

Meanwhile, Sweeney assured disappointed fans looking forward to the groundbreaking technology offered by the Unreal Engine 3 that they needn't worry. "With all these advanced shaders and AI, as well as sophisticated facial animations, characters are able to convey a convincing sense of concern and understanding, while we've implemented a thorough and extensive array of soothing social interactions. Instead of blasting one another with flak cannons, players can sit down and talk through their feelings of hostility."

"Of course, there was some internal resistance initially," chuckled Sweeney. "But we just fired up a Beta of UT3 and resolved the squabble in-game. Some pixel tears were shed, but after a few trust falls, everyone felt much better." **Ü**



ARTIST'S IMPRESSION OF THE WII 1-UP AND A DINOSAUR

WII "1-UP"

Hot on the heels of the Xbox 360 Elite with its black exterior, beefy 120GB hard drive and non-compliant HDMI support comes the Nintendo Wii "1-UP": a spruced-up, prettified version of the popular exercise kit that has managed to capture the pacemakers of the elderly everywhere. "It's like having only ferocious dinosaurs," mentions top Nintendo psychic friend Shigeru Miyamoto, "They might fight and hasten their own extinction."

Incontinent Wii designer Ken'ichiro Ashida was brought back from his hiatus in Switzerland to design the new Wii "1-UP", which Nintendo hopes will "be a total Revolution" according to an inside source who sat next to Satoru Iwata on the train while on the way to karaoke. Ashida has described his design philosophy for the "1-UP" as "live with it, sleep with it, eat with it, move along with it," before proceeding to duct-tape two GameCubes together, shouting "FLYING MAN" and flying off into the sunset. As most journalists have discovered, there is a cultural barrier one has to deal with when talking to the strange nations across the ocean. **Ü**

ÜBER REVIEWS

THE SIMS 2: RAISING HELL

Reviewer: Amber Darkchylde

In a significant departure from its usual wholesome fare, the latest Sims 2 expansion redefines the game's 'family-orientated' approach. A new 'Obstreperous Adolescent' life stage has been added, as well as a 'Parental Divorce' Aspiration and a 'Narco-3000 Chem Lab' Aspiration Reward. Rebellious teens now have 'Wants' including 'High School Dropout', 'Vandalise Something', 'Make Mum Cry', and a 'Pregnancy!' 'Fear', while parent Sims have to fend off NPC townie drug and small arms dealers, devil-worshipping metal heads, and circus recruiters. New online interactions have been added, including insidious chatroom cultists who will attempt to lure unhappy teens to fortified breeding compounds. New teen social interactions include 'Pitch Hissy', 'Spit' and 'Sulk', while desperate parents have been granted a last-ditch 'Guilt Trip'. A basic physics model has been implemented to render



most household objects destructible. Although I found most of the additions thoroughly enjoyable, the emo soundtrack did get tired quickly. **Ü**

VERDICT!: Am I Evil? I am maaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!
SCORE: 5/10/5

CHESS

Reviewer: Dale Domino

Confusing, right, but this game is pretty awesome. Firstly, it comes on its own platform, which initially threw me off. Also, it was a bit tricky figuring out the controller. See, Chess is a bit of a paradigm breaker. It comes with lots of 'pieces', which you physically move around the platform. I figured that out after putting the platform next to my consoles and sitting on the couch for a while. It didn't turn on anything, but after perusing the manual a bit, I figured out its nuances.

The gameplay is equally daunting, at first. Because of the lack of a tutorial, the manual was the only reference I had. Still, things wouldn't add up until I figured out that it's a multiplayer game, but strictly for two participants. After enlisting a friend's help, I finally made sense of it all. But once you understand Chess, you'll love it, since



it's the best battle simulator ever created. Unfortunately, its cryptic nature will put off the less dedicated gamer. I suspect, though, that my set is incomplete, since we had to add our own dice, plus you only get eight pawns to a side to sacrifice for unit summons. That barely gets you two knights and a bishop! **Ü**

VERDICT!: Think Final Fantasy, but with JRPG influences.
SCORE: E = mc²

flow

Reviewer: Jim-Bob Pilates

The PlayStation 3 is the best console ever and nothing anyone says will change that. The PlayStation 2 is the best-selling console ever and the PlayStation 3 will be too, as soon as all the kids grow up enough to be able to afford it. Unfortunately, I believe that Sony may have made a mistake releasing flow on the PlayStation 3, because I don't think the game is very Christian. flow was originally an experiment by some guy on the Internet in 'game dynamics' or something, and he developed a Flash game to represent his ideas. Sony saw it and paid the guy to make a better version for the PlayStation 3, which you can buy from the PlayStation Store for R45. In flow, you control this little worm thing and swim around,



directing it by tilting the PS3 controller as if you're rolling a marble on a plate. I ate a little creature and 'evolved', so I deleted the game. **Ü**

VERDICT!: Science propaganda provoking biological myth!
SCORE: 666

Kratos kicked Jason's ass

IN THE SHADOW OF A GOD OF WAR

BEING A VIDEOGAME SUPERSTAR AND LORD OF WAR IS A BUSY GIG. BUT THE MAN HIMSELF GRANTED ÜBERGAMER'S CELEBRITY HOUND, TOM FICKLEFAIRY, AN OPPORTUNITY TO DELVE INTO HIS DARK CONSCIOUSNESS.

He sat in the sunlight, sipping on an iced H tea and adjusting his designer sunglasses ever so slightly - just to reflect the right amount of 'cool' for the moment. But this is one Spartan who doesn't have a problem standing out from the crowd. Chained to his forearms, his two Chaos Blades rest calmly against the restaurant balcony's railing. Kratos, the God of War, reclined back, awaiting my arrival to interview him. I walked over and introduced myself.

"Let's get one thing straight," Kratos said while holding me at the scruff of my shirt and dangling me over the void beyond the balcony, "The Spartans in 300 are wimps. I could take on the entire Persian army and still be home for lunch. No questions about the 300 Spartans!" Nodding in agreement, I find myself put back on terra firma. The movie must be a sore point for Kratos, who defeated Hades and Aries, not to mention ascending to the Hall of the Gods to take his place as the new God of War. Kratos doesn't like being in the shadow of a graphic-novel-turned-CG-extravaganza.

"Let me tell you something," he sneered, "You know why those Spartans got their butts handed to them? They didn't ask for my help! I'd be there in a flash, but that king had something or another against subservience. So, they learned

it the hard way. You know which part they didn't show? The bit where Hades kicked their sorry asses all the way up and down the Styx." But clearly, Kratos, judging by my near brush with a high drop, didn't want to talk about those Spartans. He usually avoids the press tours for his games, but does grant the odd interview, which made this a great time to find out more about the series and where the God of War sees himself in the future.

Brushing his beard, Kratos pondered this thoughtfully. Eventually he shrugged: "It's no secret that I completely and totally trash more deities in the new game. I could definitely go very far, perhaps even take on the really big gods like Spider-Man. But I don't know if that's really me. The higher up you go, the more red tape and the less action there are." A desk job, like a comfortable throne and full manipulation of all living things, would cramp his style. In the long term, Kratos considers more wholesome, holistic activities. But he's not worried about taking risks with his career.

"If all else fails, there's always Cerebus training. I've been running a very successful business doing it on the side. I might even retire to it." He was even kind enough to give me some free Cerebus advice: "Don't let the

three heads put you off. Everyone thinks 'Oh no! Three times the food', but a Cerebus only has one stomach. But don't make that mistake with Hydras - they'll eat you out of house and home and respond terribly to disciplining."

But what about the games themselves? Will we see more of the God of War? Kratos cannot think of a reason why not, but he says his people and Sony are still chatting. A good game, he says, is all about timing: "It's like petting a Cerebus - you really have to remember which head you gave attention to last." So that means we might get another game? Kratos wouldn't be drawn into it, making his point by grabbing the waitress and snapping her in two. How does he get away with it, I wondered. But Kratos shrugged, pointing out that he isn't the one picking up the bill.

The God of War was becoming restless and starting picking his teeth with his blades. Attempting one more question, I wanted to know what he thought of the PlayStation 3. But at that moment Kratos saw someone, his eyes fired up and, screaming "ATHENA!!!", he jumped off the balcony. A massive explosion rocked the place and I woke up in ICU three days later. The God of War wasn't there. Word on the street has it he's currently beating the hell out of Perseus to get Pegasus. **U**

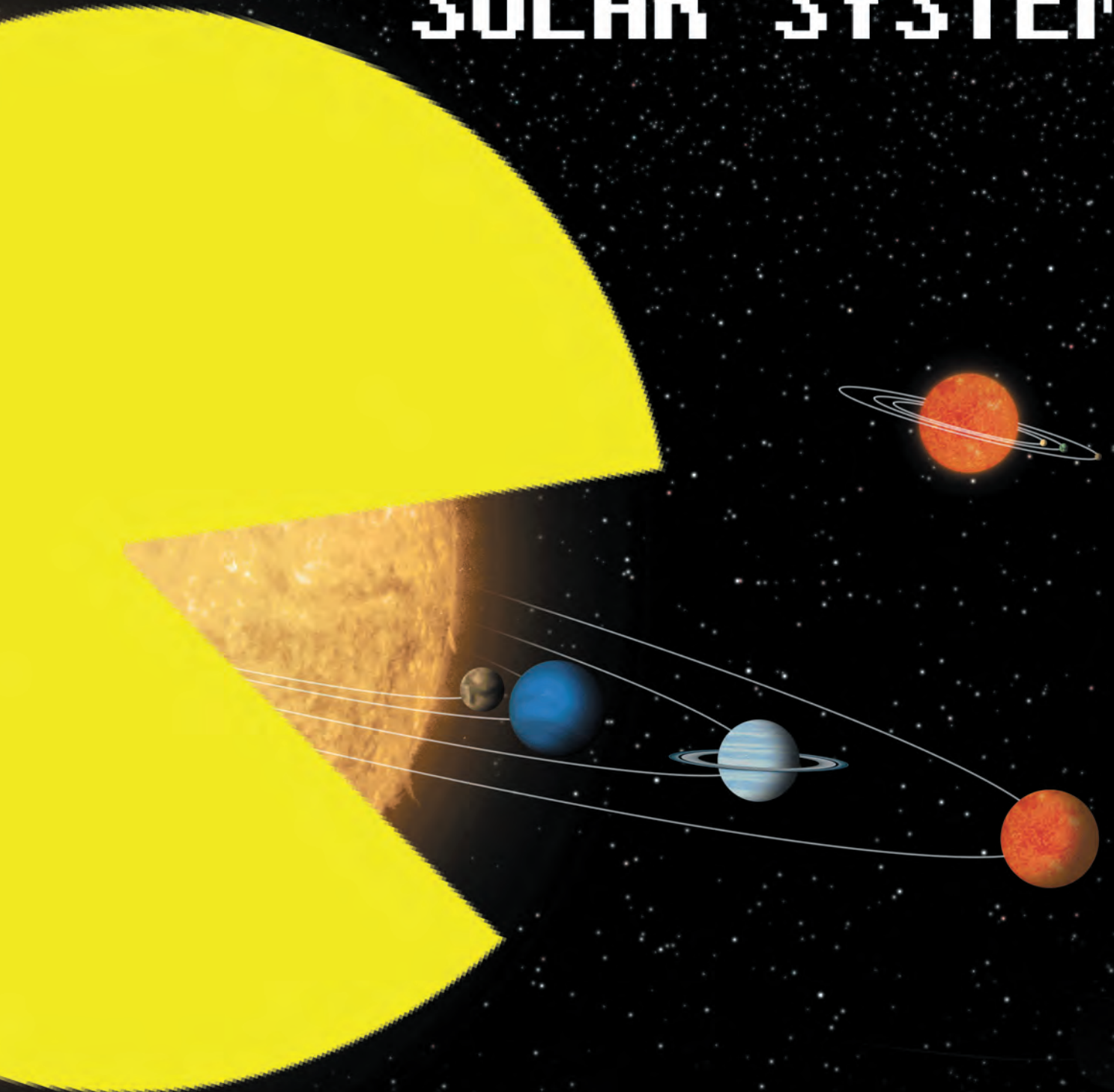
Kratos vs. the Nazis



Kratos hunting with his wolf, Lars

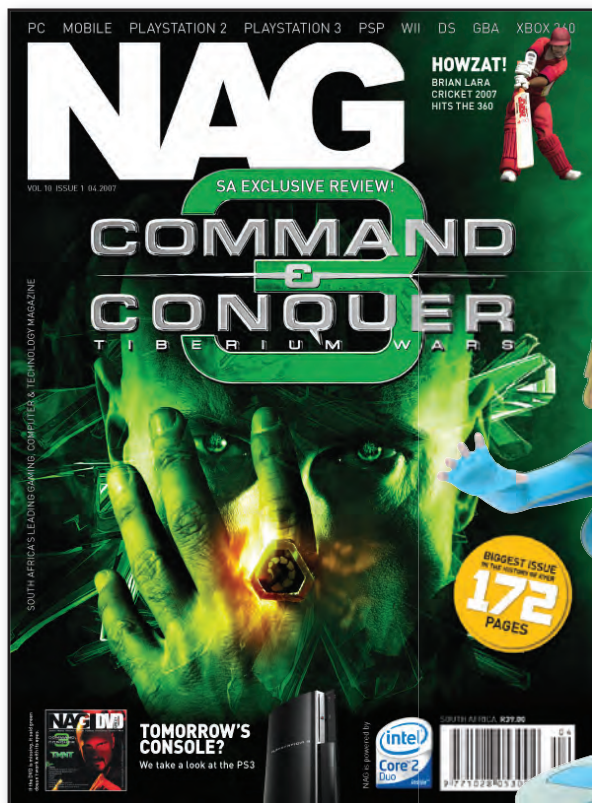


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